

Teacher Confidence, Perceived Competence, and Home–School Partnerships: Strengthening Inclusive Education in Mainland China, Hong Kong (SAR), and Singapore

Zhanina Dimova, Enze Fang, Benjamin Gan, Hechang Jin, Louise Mehrabian, Rebecca Saunders,
Daisy Loyd, Zachary Walker

The Reach Alliance

The Reach Alliance is a consortium of global universities — with partners in Australia, Canada, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Singapore, South Africa, United Kingdom, and the United States — developing the leaders we need to solve urgent local challenges of the hard to reach — those underserved for geographic, administrative, or social reasons. Working in interdisciplinary teams, Reach’s globally minded students use rigorous research methods to identify innovative solutions to climate, public health, and economic challenges. Research is conducted in collaboration with local communities and with guidance from university faculty members, building capacity and skills among Reach’s student researchers. The power of the Reach Alliance stems from engaging leading universities to unleash actionable research insights for impact. These insights have been published in leading journals and taken up by policymakers and sector leaders around the world.

The Reach Alliance was created in 2015 by the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, in partnership with the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth. It is guided by an advisory council of leaders in academia, and in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors who help to drive impact, influence and scale, and support fundraising efforts.

Note: Authors are listed alphabetically with the faculty mentors listed last.

Cover photo: Girl with Down syndrome plays with puzzle with her teacher in a classroom. (Passakorn Prothien, iStock)



Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the openness of the parents/caregivers and educators who shared their experiences and stories with us across Mainland China, Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region, or SAR), and Singapore. Our sincere thanks go to our local partners, school bodies, and administration teams whose coordination of one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, and group workshops was essential to the success of this study. We are particularly grateful to Dr. Jiahui Yang of Beijing Normal University for her valuable advice, local expertise, and support throughout the development of the Mainland China component of this project. We also extend our warm thanks to our advisors in Singapore who provided valuable advice, support, and insights on inclusive education in the local context. These include Professor Kenneth Poon of the National Institute of Education, Singapore, Ms Sarinajit Kaur of the Academy of Singapore Teachers, MOE Singapore, and Dr. Celine Kim. We are equally grateful to our advisors at The Education University of Hong Kong.

We thank our faculty mentors, Daisy Loyd and Zachary Walker, for their contributions, and our Reach Alliance coaches, Peter Muir and Amber Bimm, for their guidance throughout this project. We also thank the University College London and the Reach Alliance for providing the institutional support that facilitated this research.

We hope the insights gathered across these three Asian contexts move beyond this study to inform teacher training and strengthen the quality of education for all students with special educational needs and disabilities.

Disclaimer: The views, findings, and conclusions in this research report are solely those of the authors collectively, and do not necessarily represent the official policies, positions, or endorsements of the organizations, institutions, or stakeholders acknowledged.

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Gemini 3.5 for nonformal text translation and Gemini 3.5 and GPT 5.0 for grammar correction of author-written text. The authors reviewed and edited all output, verified its accuracy against primary sources, and take full responsibility for the content of this work.



Contribution	Contributor (Initials)
Conception or design of the work	ZD, EF, BG, HJ, LM, RS, DL, ZW
Data collection	ZD, EF, BG, HJ, LM, RS
Data transcription	ZD, EF, BG, HJ, LM, RS
Data analysis and interpretation	ZD, EF, BG, HJ, LM, RS
Drafting of the case study report	ZD, EF, BG, HJ, LM, RS, DL, ZW
Critical revision of the case study report	ZD, EF, BG, HJ, LM, RS, DL, ZW
Final approval of the version to be submitted	ZD, EF, BG, HJ, LM, RS, DL, ZW

Contents

Executive Summary.....1

Context: International Policy Diffusion and Rapid Policy Development.....2

Hardly Reached.....7

About Our Research.....9

What We Found.....12

Impact: Lessons Learned.....20





Figure 1. Children's drawing from school in Mainland China

Executive Summary

Although every student deserves meaningful education where they feel included, supported, and able to learn, students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are among the most likely to be excluded by education systems worldwide. This is especially important to understand in diverse and rapidly developing education systems such as Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, where academic pressures and beliefs about disability can strongly shape how inclusive education is understood and practised. Teachers play a crucial role in making classrooms inclusive for all students but research indicates that many teachers experience stress and low confidence in managing diverse classrooms. In the context of special educational needs and disabilities, the partnership between teachers and parents/caregivers is vital but frequently strained by a lack of systemic support and shared understanding.

This study uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore inclusive education across these three Asian contexts. We collected quantitative data through online surveys and qualitative data through one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, and group workshops to ascertain teachers' perspectives and experiences. By targeting mainstream educators and parents/caregivers of

children with SEND across these contexts, our study aims to improve the quality of education for students with SEND.

While national and institutional policies recognize the principles of inclusive education, implementation in practice varies across all three contexts and individual settings. However, across all contexts teachers are able to identify individuals' needs (either prior to, or without a formal diagnosis) through observation and professional judgment. Teachers often articulated their need for further guidance on forming and implementing support plans, with additional professional development needed to further aid confidence and competence in supporting students with SEND. Additional factors to be considered include teacher qualifications and recruitment, the nature of academically demanding school environments, and home-school partnerships. These factors play a crucial part in ensuring effective inclusive practice is in place in classrooms.

We discovered a gap between inclusive education policy and real-world practice across Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, using evidence from quantitative data and front-line voices. Findings support stronger policy standardization, professionalized specialist resource teacher roles, and improved teacher training to reduce pressure on mainstream teachers and parents/caregivers. This study provides an empirical basis for strengthening teacher training and advancing the United Nations Sustainable Goal 4 (SDG 4) to improve the quality of education and well-being of students with SEND.

Context: International Policy Diffusion and Rapid Policy Development

Inclusive education in Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore is underpinned by international rights-based frameworks that have been reinterpreted

through local legal, political, and governance systems. Over the past several decades, international frameworks such as the *Salamanca Statement*, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD), and the *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action* have promoted educational rights, educational equity, participation within mainstream schooling, and the development of more inclusive education systems.¹

However, the same global discourse on inclusive education has produced different institutional points of emphasis across the three contexts. Following Mainland China's ratification of the UNCRPD in 2008, the 2017 revision of the Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities further strengthened its policy commitment to inclusive education and prioritized placement in mainstream

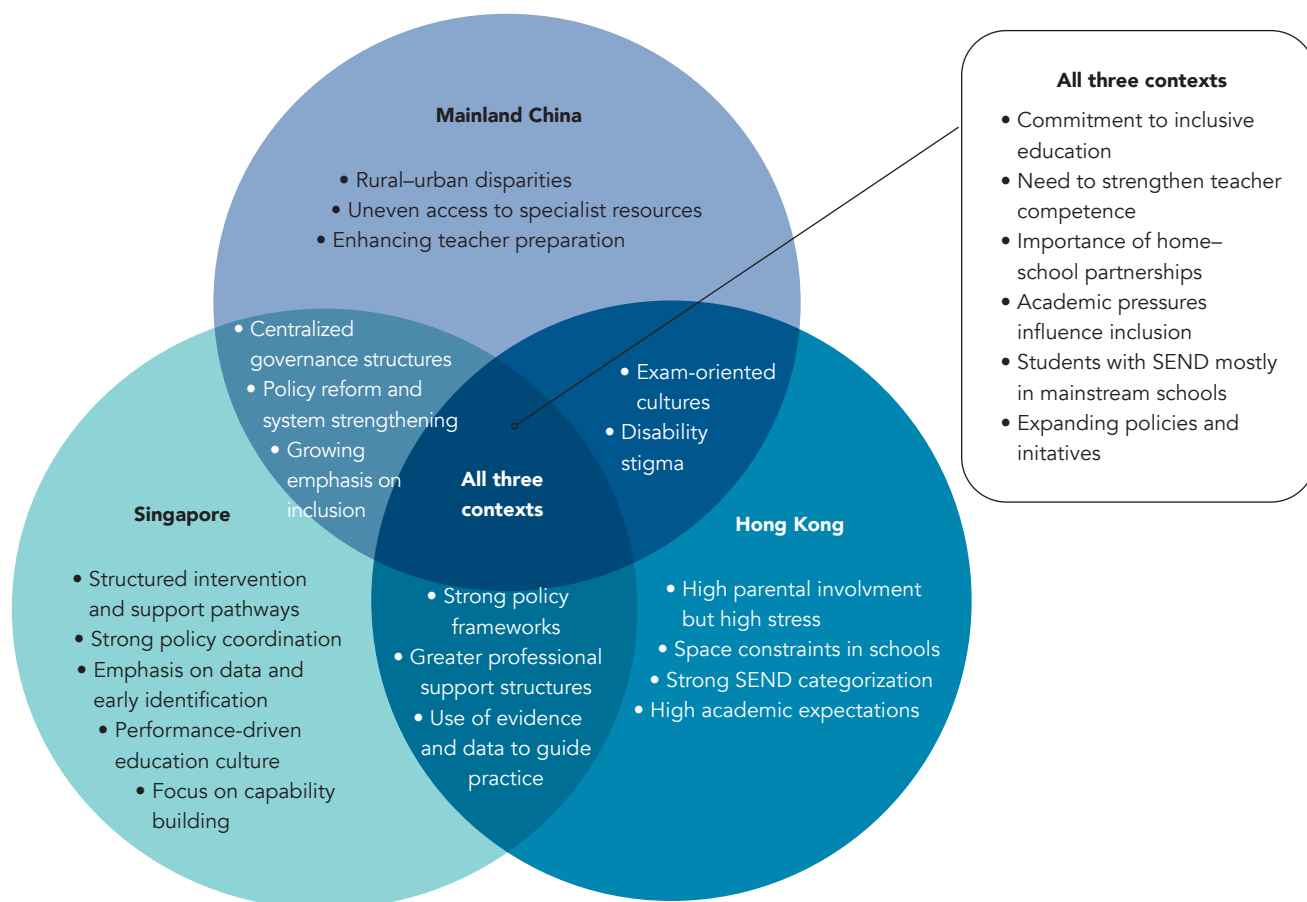


Figure 2. Venn diagram showing how Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore shape inclusive education settings in these three regions

¹ "The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education," UNESCO, 1994; *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, United Nations General Assembly, vol. 2515, p. 3, [link](#); "Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All," UNESCO, 2016. [link](#)

educational settings wherever appropriate.² Subsequent Special Education Promotion Plans and the Action Plan for the Development and Enhancement of Special Education during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period continued to expand inclusive education structures across the country.³ Hong Kong, by contrast, connected anti-discrimination principles directly to school responsibility through the 2001 Code of Practice on Education, and the 1997 introduction of the Whole School Approach framework.⁴ The UNCRPD was also extended to Hong Kong in 2008, further embedding inclusive education within a rights and equality framework. Singapore, while not adopting the same anti-discrimination legal pathway as Hong Kong, has progressively expanded cross-sector disability support through successive Enabling Masterplans.

Dual-Track Systems and Parallel Placement Logics

None of the three contexts pursued the complete abolition of special schools as the goal of inclusive education reform. Instead, all three gradually developed dual-track or continuum-based systems in which mainstream inclusion and specialized provision coexist. Although international inclusive education discourse has long emphasized participation within ordinary schools, Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore have all retained multi-layered placement structures rather than fully dismantling special education systems. Mainland China's 1994 Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities formally recognized three forms of compulsory educational placement: learning in regular classrooms (LRC), special classes attached to mainstream schools, and special schools, while the

2017 revision further prioritized ordinary education wherever possible. Hong Kong's Education Bureau likewise explicitly describes its special education model as a dual-track system, whereby students with more severe or multiple disabilities are referred to special schools, while other students receive support within mainstream schools. Singapore reported that by the end of 2025, approximately 38,500 students identified as having SEND were enrolled within the education system. Around 80 per cent attended mainstream schools and the remaining 20 per cent attended 24 government-funded special education (SPED) schools.⁵

The emergence of this shared structural model is closely linked to the wide variation in disability types, support intensity, and curriculum accessibility needs, which makes any single placement model insufficient to meet the needs of all learners. All three contexts possess relatively established traditions of special education, specialized professional systems, and trained support personnel. Special schools therefore continue to play important roles not only in education, but also in assessment, rehabilitation, vocational preparation, and professional support, which means it is unrealistic for mainstream schools to fully replace specialized provision in the short term. As inclusive education policies continue to expand, support structures within mainstream schools also continue to grow, including resource rooms, school-based support services, SEND coordination roles, itinerant support, and interdisciplinary collaboration mechanisms. Support resources are increasingly embedded within ordinary schooling systems rather than remaining concentrated solely within special schools.⁶

2 Shixin Huang, "Ten Years of the CRPD's Adoption in China: Challenges and Opportunities," *Disability and Society* 34, no. 6 (2019): 1004–1009; "Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities" (Revised 2017), State Council of the People's Republic of China, translated and hosted by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. [↗](#)

3 "Second Phase Special Education Promotion Plan (2017–2020)," Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017; "Action Plan for the Development and Enhancement of Special Education during the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan Period," Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021.

4 Disability Discrimination Ordinance, Cap. 487 (1996) (HK), [↗](#); "Whole School Approach to Integrated Education," Operational Guide, Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 2001; "Code of Practice on Education under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance," Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission, 2001, [↗](#); "Whole School Approach to Integrated Education," Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 1997.

5 "MOE FY2025 Committee of Supply Debate Response by Second Minister for Education Dr Maliki Osman," Ministry of Education, Singapore, 6 March 2025.

6 "Latest Development of Integrated Education," Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, SENSE. [↗](#)

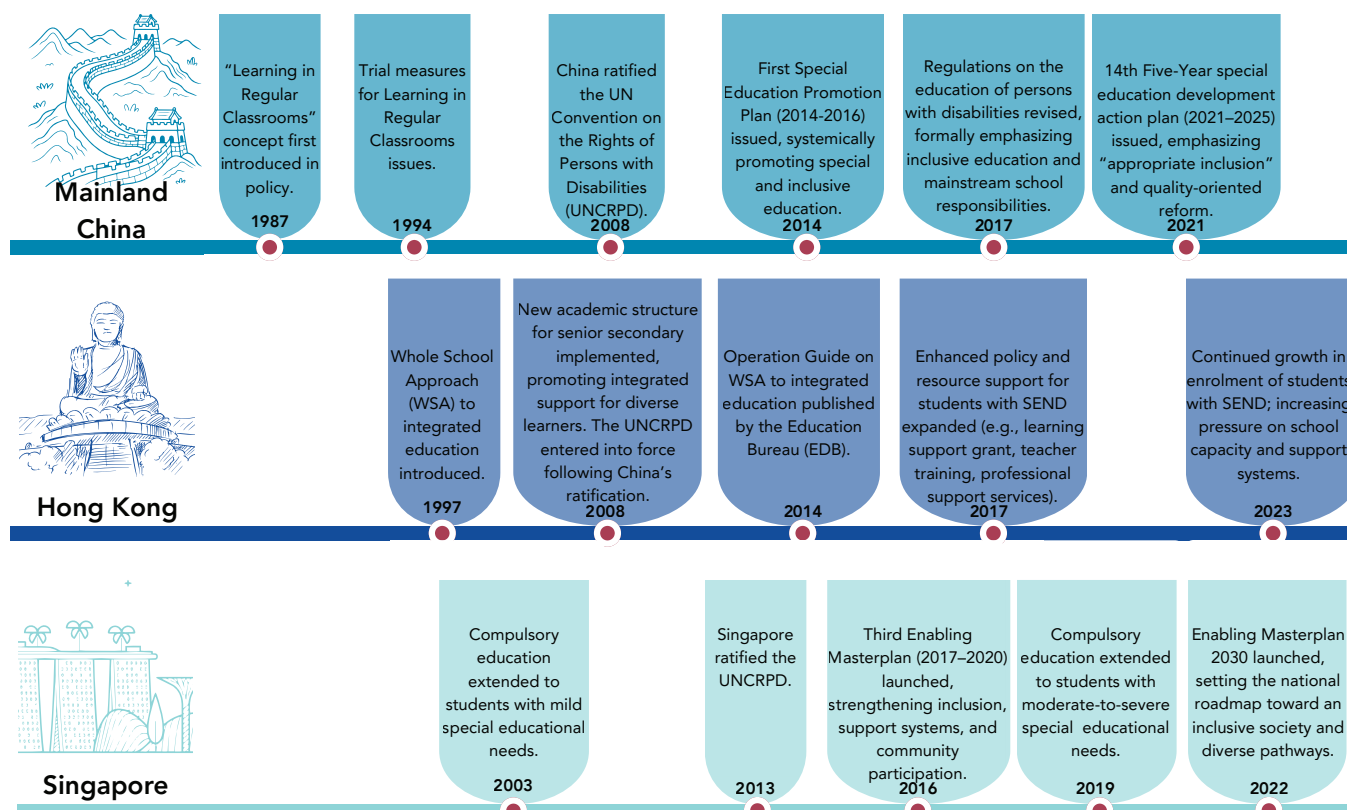


Figure 3. Timeline showing chronological progression of key policy milestones in inclusive education across Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore

Mainland China has increasingly promoted inclusive education in response to United Nations SDG 4, which focuses on ensuring equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all learners.⁷ Approaches such as LRC, resource classrooms, and specialist support services have expanded across many regions. However, despite these developments, achieving equitable and meaningful inclusion for students with SEND remains a significant challenge within the Mainland Chinese educational system.

Mainland China's inclusive education system has been characterized by the coexistence of special education and mainstream inclusion, particularly through the development of the LRC initiative. While policies increasingly encourage the inclusion of students with SEND in mainstream schools, implementation remains uneven across regions and schools. In practice, support continues to be directed primarily toward students with visible or formally

identified disabilities, whereas learners with less visible learning, behavioural, emotional, or mental health needs may receive less systematic recognition and support. Compared with countries such as the United Kingdom, where social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) is formally recognized as one of the four broad areas of need within the SEND framework, Mainland China has yet to develop an equally comprehensive classification and support system for these less visible needs. This continues to present challenges for achieving SDG 4's goal of equitable access and participation for all learners.

Mainstream teachers are often expected to support students with SEND without sufficient training, specialist guidance, or resource support. Families also frequently face difficulties accessing services and navigating communication with schools. A recurring challenge within the Mainland Chinese context is the gap between policy expectations and everyday classroom realities. Teachers and parents/

⁷ "Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All," UNESCO, 2016.

“

A recurring challenge within the Mainland Chinese context is the gap between policy expectations and everyday classroom realities. Teachers and parents/caregivers frequently report pressures related to limited resources, academic expectations, and insufficient support systems.

caregivers frequently report pressures related to limited resources, academic expectations, and insufficient support systems. As a result, both groups often experience stress, uncertainty, and exhaustion when supporting children with SEND in mainstream educational settings. These challenges highlight the continuing need to strengthen teacher competence, improve home-school partnerships, and develop more contextually responsive approaches to inclusive education. This aligns closely with the Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, particularly SDG Target 4.5, which seeks to eliminate inequalities in education and ensure equal access for learners with disabilities, and SDG Target 4.c, which emphasizes increasing the supply of qualified teachers and strengthening teacher development within inclusive education systems.⁸

While our study primarily aligns with SDG 4, the challenges identified within the Chinese context also closely intersect with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Beyond unequal access to educational resources and specialist support, the research highlights several forms of structural and relational inequality within the inclusive education system itself. These include unequal power dynamics between parents/caregivers

and teachers, where parents/caregivers often perceive teachers and schools as authority figures and may feel limited in their ability to advocate for their children. Inequalities were also evident between front-line teachers and school leadership, particularly in relation to decision-making power, responsibility, workload, and access to institutional and resource support. Disparities between mainstream schools and special schools also continue to shape inclusive education practices because special schools often possess greater specialist knowledge, trained personnel, and support resources, yet may remain marginalized within broader educational decision-making structures. Together, these inequalities influence how inclusive education policies are interpreted, implemented, and experienced across different educational contexts in Mainland China.

Hong Kong has seen a growing enrolment of students with SEND across both local and international schools. The city currently has more than 800 local schools, including 62 special schools and 52 international schools, one of which is a specialist special school.⁹ As increasing numbers of students with SEND enter mainstream educational settings, schools and teachers face growing pressure to provide inclusive, equitable, and sustainable forms of support.

Despite ongoing policy development, tensions remain between inclusive education policy and classroom practice. While local schools operate under the Education Bureau's (EDB) inclusive education framework, implementation of the framework varies considerably depending on school resources, teacher preparedness, and institutional priorities. International schools are often perceived as being better positioned to support students with SEND due to their comparatively greater resources, private funding structures, and increased curricular and administrative flexibility. Unlike local schools, many international schools are not strictly bound by the EDB's inclusive education framework, allowing greater autonomy in designing learning support systems and SEND provision. However, an inclusive ethos does not always translate into consistent practice, and support

8 Ibid.

9 "School Types," International Schools in Hong Kong, Education Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. 

experiences can differ significantly between schools and educational settings.

Limited research explores teachers' lived experiences, confidence, and preparedness for implementing inclusive practices within Hong Kong's international school context. As schools continue to encounter increasing diversity in learning needs, issues arise in teacher capacity, access to appropriate support systems, and the consistency of inclusive provision. These are closely connected to the broader aims of United Nations SDG 4, particularly targets 4.5 and 4.c, which emphasize equitable access to quality education for students with SEND and strengthening qualified teacher support within inclusive education systems. Addressing these challenges is therefore essential for improving educational practice and for advancing more inclusive and equitable educational opportunities for students with SEND in Hong Kong.

“

Limited research explores teachers' lived experiences, confidence, and preparedness for implementing inclusive practices within Hong Kong's international school context.

Singapore. Singapore's approach to inclusive education has developed pragmatically through a dual-track model. Students with mild SEN, such as dyslexia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), mild autism, and sensory or physical impairments, are generally educated in mainstream schools, while students with moderate-to-severe SEND may attend government-funded special education schools. The Ministry of Education reports that approximately 80 per cent of students with SEND are enrolled in mainstream schools, supported through Special Educational Needs Officers (SENO) and school-based case-management structures.

Singapore ratified the UNCPRD in 2013, and over the past 13 years its approach to inclusive education has shifted from limited accommodation toward a more structured model of supported participation for students with SEND. This is reflected in the extension of compulsory education to children with moderate-to-severe SEND from 2019, the expansion of school-based SEND support within mainstream schools, and the inclusion of disability support within the Enabling Masterplan 2030. These developments align closely with SDG 4, particularly the goal of ensuring equitable access to education for students with SEND.

Singapore's inclusion trajectory continues to balance inclusion with curriculum expectations and resource considerations. While policy reforms have expanded access and recognition for students with SEND, differences remain between mainstream and special education pathways, particularly in relation to curriculum and support provision. Teacher preparedness, and how schools manage increasingly diverse learning needs within academically demanding educational environments, are important factors for schools to consider.

Policy Expansion, Responsibility Shifting, and Inclusive Education Pressures in High-Performance Systems

Although Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore differ significantly in governance structures, policy trajectories, and support systems, all three continue to experience a highly similar set of structural challenges in practice. One of the key challenges across all three is the tension between high-performance, examination-oriented education systems and the flexibility required for inclusive education. Despite ongoing moves to reduce their emphasis on examination success, the three school systems remain heavily oriented toward standardized curricula and measurable performance. By contrast, inclusive education requires differentiated support, flexible adjustment, and relational forms of practice that require additional time, resources, and institutional flexibility. In practice, teachers are therefore expected to meet academic and performance expectations while simultaneously responding to increasingly diverse learner needs,

often causing inclusive practices to operate at the margins of existing educational structures.

The rapid expansion of inclusive education policy over the past two decades has gradually shifted increasing responsibility onto mainstream schools and front-line teachers. Tasks that were previously carried out by special education institutions or specialized professionals — including differentiated support, behavioural management, interdisciplinary collaboration, home-school communication, and individualized adjustment — are increasingly incorporated into mainstream teachers' daily responsibilities. However, the growth of professional training, support resources, and institutional protections has not always kept pace with the speed of policy expansion, resulting in persistent gaps between policy expectations and the realities of school implementation.

This imbalance between policy expansion and institutional support places teachers under pressure from multiple stakeholders simultaneously. Teachers are expected to respond to increasingly complex student learning and behavioural needs, manage parental expectations regarding academic outcomes and support provision, and satisfy school-level accountability systems linked to policy implementation and performance evaluation. Inclusive education therefore becomes not only a pedagogical issue, but also a significant source of emotional, organizational, and institutional labour.

This is the structural context that our project focuses on: teachers' perceived competence. Drawing on Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, perceived competence is important because teachers' beliefs about their own capabilities can influence how they approach challenges, implement inclusive practices, and engage with professional learning.¹⁰ Teachers' perceptions of their own ability to implement inclusive education are not simply matters of individual professional skill, but are deeply shaped by policy trajectories, institutional support systems, high-performance educational cultures, and the dynamics of home-school relationships.

“

Inclusive education therefore becomes not only a pedagogical issue, but also a significant source of emotional, organizational, and institutional labour.

Hardly Reached

While inclusive education is partly about physical access to classrooms, it also involves participation, belonging, feeling understood, and having access to appropriate support within everyday learning environments. Students with SEND can become hard to reach not only because of individual learning needs, but also because of the complex systems and relationships surrounding them. Experiences of inclusion are influenced by interactions across multiple levels of a child's environment, including relationships with teachers, communication between schools and families, access to specialist support, school culture, educational expectations, wider policy structures, and broader social attitudes toward disability and difference. In other words, barriers to participation are often relational and systemic, rather than located solely within the child.

Although inclusive education policies increasingly promote equitable access to mainstream schooling, the realities of implementation are often far more complex and uneven across schools and classrooms. Students with SEND often continue to experience exclusion when educational systems, support structures, and professional environments are not fully equipped to respond to different forms of learning and participation in meaningful and sustainable ways. Not all students, families, or schools experience inclusion equally and students with SEND are not one homogenous group.

10 Albert Bandura, *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1997).

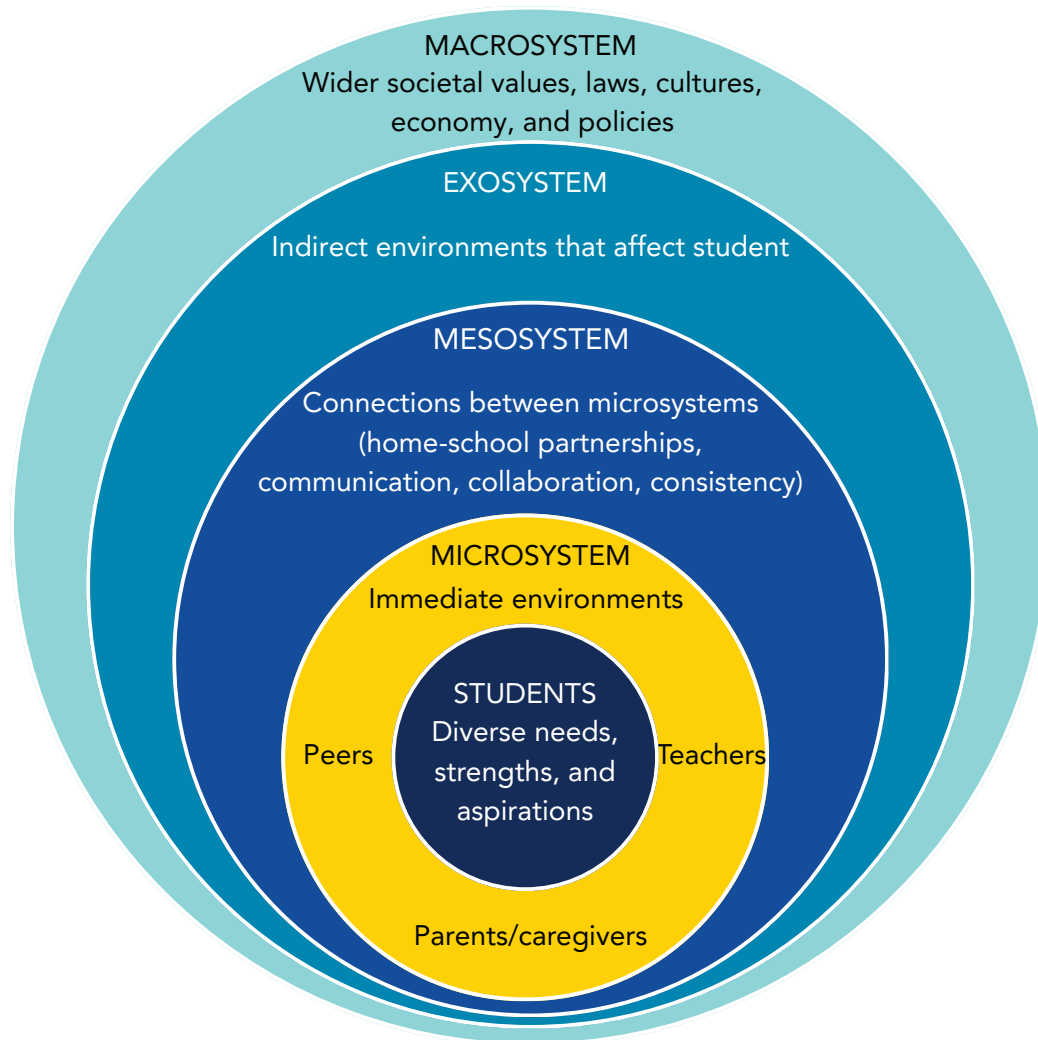


Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner-inspired ecological lens to map the systems influencing students by layers of environmental factors, relationships, and societal systems¹¹

Experiences of participation and exclusion can differ depending on factors such as socioeconomic background, language, type of support needs, school resources, family support, and wider cultural perceptions of disability.

Our case study therefore approaches inclusion through a broader ecological lens, recognizing that children's educational experiences are shaped not only by their individual characteristics, but also by the relationships, environments, and systems surrounding them.

Understanding inclusion therefore requires attention to the interactions among learners, families, schools, support services, communities, and wider policy contexts. Questions of inclusion cannot be separated from questions of teacher preparedness, school culture, family engagement, access to support services, and the wider institutional conditions shaping everyday school life. Across Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, teachers are increasingly expected to support diverse student needs within mainstream classrooms while balancing curriculum demands, behavioural support, communication with families, and broader school responsibilities. While research has consistently highlighted the

¹¹ Helen Lynch and Leah O'Toole, "Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Human Development," in *Routledge Companion to Occupational Therapy*, 1st ed., edited by Moses N. Ikiugu et al. (London: Routledge, 2025).

importance of teacher preparation, efficacy, and ongoing professional learning in supporting inclusive practice,¹² implementing inclusive education remains a complex process that extends beyond initial teacher preparation, requiring ongoing development of instructional, collaborative, and behavioural competencies to support diverse learners effectively.

We focus on teachers because they play a central role in shaping how students experience inclusion in everyday school life. By exploring teachers’ experiences of perceived competence and confidence, professional learning, and collaboration with families and schools, we sought to better understand how inclusive education is currently supported across different educational contexts, where gaps continue to emerge, and how systems of support surrounding children with SEND can become more meaningful and responsive to everyday realities. We recognize that inclusive education is shaped not only by policy, but also by relationships between schools, teachers, families, and wider support systems.

Rather than viewing inclusion solely as a question of placement within mainstream schools, the research highlights the importance of building educational systems that are collaborative, responsive, and

capable of supporting diverse learners in meaningful ways. Strengthening teacher competence, professional learning, and home–school partnerships is therefore not only as an educational priority, but also part of creating more equitable opportunities for learners who remain at risk of exclusion within mainstream education systems.

About Our Research

Our project involved three parallel journeys to Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Singapore, with one shared mission to understand what inclusion looked like in everyday classrooms, and how we might help enhance it in each context.

Six Reach Alliance researchers worked on the project, with two researchers focusing on each context. This allowed each pair to develop a closer understanding of the local education system, while working from our shared goals and research questions. We sought to understand:

Shared mission: Strengthening teachers’ competence and home–school partnerships in inclusive education

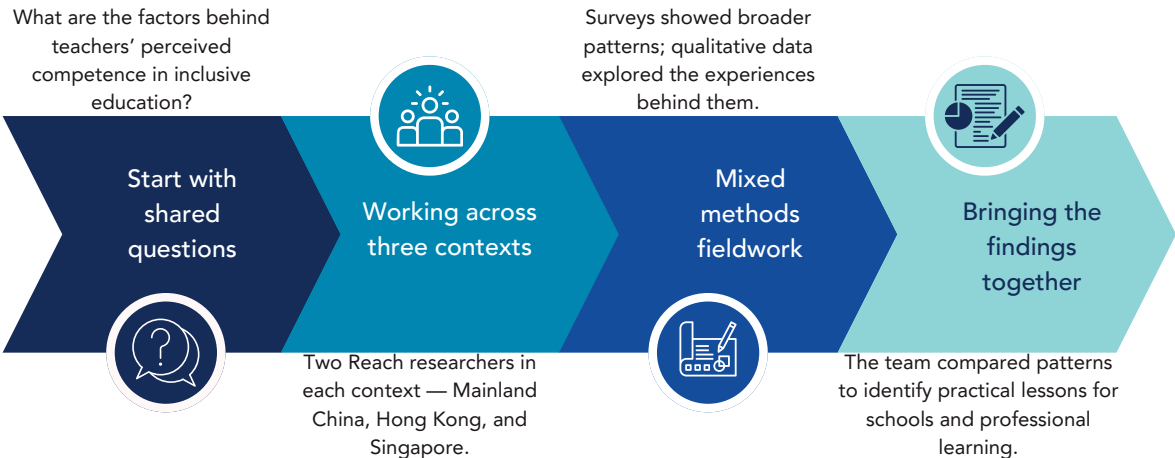


Figure 5. The step-by-step collaborative workflow used by our research team across three contexts

12 Umesh Sharma, Tim Loreman, and Chris Forlin, “Measuring Teacher Efficacy to Implement Inclusive Practices,” *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 12, no. 1 (2012): 12–21.

- how teachers perceive their competence in implementing inclusive, high-leverage, and culturally responsive practices
- whether factors such as teaching experience, school type, school phase, qualifications, or prior professional development shape teachers' competence
- how teachers facilitate inclusion in everyday classrooms
- what barriers and enablers shape teachers' support for students with SEND
- how schools and families work together to support students
- what kinds of professional development and learning might better prepare teachers and schools for inclusive practice.

The study used a mixed-methods approach, with quantitative survey data complemented by qualitative data from interviews, focus groups, and a participatory workshop.

Survey

We administered a survey using three internationally validated questionnaires to identify broader patterns in teachers' perceived competence in inclusive practices. To ensure linguistic accuracy, the administration language was adapted for each context: exclusively English in Singapore; bilingual English and Cantonese in Hong Kong (with Cantonese elements verified by an EdUHK academic, a native speaker, and a bilingual team member); and bilingual English and Mandarin in Mainland China (translated via consensus by two native Mandarin-speaking researchers and validated by a BNU academic local partner). The three questionnaires explored:

- **SEND Reflection Framework (SRF)** — 39 items covering seven subscales across areas of teaching practice: knowledge of learner, quality of teaching and learning, creating an environment conducive to effective learning, transitions and change, systems and processes, working and communicating with families, and working with other professionals.¹³
- **High-Leverage Practices (HLP)** — 21 items covering four areas of practice that are known to

Table 1. Data collected in each context

Context	Survey evidence	Qualitative fieldwork
Mainland China	48	23 semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents/caregivers
Hong Kong	Awaiting responses	19 semi-structured interviews with teachers from international/private schools
Singapore	43	2 focus groups comprising 10 primary and secondary school teachers, and a participatory workshop involving 8 teachers

Note: Due to stakeholder scheduling constraints, data collection in Hong Kong is ongoing and will continue past the publication of this report.

13 Daisy Loyd, Maxwell Peprah Opoku, Zachary Walker, et al., "Examining Teachers' Perceived Competence in Implementing Inclusive Education Practices in the United Arab Emirates," *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 24, no. 3 (2004): 837–854; "SEND Reflection Framework," Whole School SEND, 2020. [↗](#)

have the greatest capacity to improve student outcomes: collaboration, data-driven planning, instruction in behaviour and academics, and when to intensify and intervene as needed.¹⁴

- **Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy (CRTSE)** — 20 items measuring how confident teachers are in their ability to implement culturally responsive practices in inclusive classrooms.¹⁵

The survey also helped us explore whether variables such as teaching experience, school level, school type, qualifications, and previous training shaped how competent teachers felt. The deliberate focus on teacher knowledge and implementation of evidence-informed practices to improve outcomes for students with SEND aims to close the research-practice gap and strategically prioritize areas for professional development.

Interviews, Focus Groups, and Participatory Workshops

The qualitative parts of the study helped us to more deeply understand the experiences behind the survey responses. Through one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, and a group workshop, teachers and parents/caregivers described what inclusion looked like in daily school settings. They talked about the support they had, the gaps they experienced, and the adjustments they made for students. The type of qualitative data collected varied slightly across the three contexts.

Mainland China. In Mainland China, primarily mainstream schools in Beijing and Zhejiang, we surveyed teachers and interviewed educators and parents/caregivers. This deliberate focus on the home–school partnership was prompted by research that suggests that in many Asian education systems, high academic expectations and substantial teacher

workloads can make home–school communication difficult to sustain.¹⁶ The quality of collaboration with parents and colleagues may influence teachers’ confidence in inclusive practice.¹⁷ We therefore examined the experiences of teachers and parents in Beijing and Zhejiang to identify communication challenges and consider practical ways to strengthen home–school partnerships and teacher preparedness.

Hong Kong. Despite a rising SEND population among Hong Kong schools and documented gaps in teacher confidence, international schools are frequently presumed to be better equipped to foster inclusive education. However, the international school sector remains a largely underexplored area in inclusive education research. In Hong Kong, we explored inclusive practice across private, international schools with a subfocus on support for autistic students and whether support for students with SEND differed across primary and secondary phases. The interviews helped us understand how aspects of inclusion can change across school phases, how teachers supported autistic students, and what professional development they felt they still needed.



Figure 6. Participant input during a focus group discussion with secondary school teachers in Singapore (photo by Zhanina Dimova)

- 14 Terese C. Aceves and Michael J. Kennedy, editors, *High-leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities* (Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children, 2024).
- 15 Szu-Yin Chu and Shernaz Garcia, "Culturally Responsive Teaching Efficacy Beliefs of In-Service Special Education Teachers," *Remedial and Special Education* 35, no. 4 (2014): 218–32; Rhoda Myra Garces-Bacsal, Daisy Loyd, Maxwell Peprah Opoku, et al., "Examining Teachers' Perceived Competence in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in Inclusive Classrooms in the United Arab Emirates," *British Journal of Special Education* 52, no. 4 (2025): 659–71.
- 16 Meng Ee Wong, Zi Jia Ng, and Kenneth Poon, "Supporting Inclusive Education: Negotiating Home-School Partnership in Singapore," *International Journal of Special Education* 30, no. 2 (2015): 119–30.
- 17 Wangqian Fu, Tao Tao, and Li She, "The Relationship of Inclusive Education Climate and Teachers' Differentiated Instruction: The Mediating Role of Efficacy for Inclusive Practices and Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (2025): 1–21.

Singapore. In Singapore, the research combined focus groups and a participatory workshop with teachers to explore how they understand and experience inclusive education within everyday school settings. The focus groups created opportunities for teachers to engage in discussion and reflection around inclusive practice, while also helping the research team better understand the barriers, challenges, and enabling factors shaping support for students with SEND in mainstream classrooms. The participatory workshop complemented these discussions by creating a collaborative space where teachers could explore what useful, practical, and realistic professional learning might look like within their own school contexts. Rather than positioning teachers solely as research participants, the workshops aimed to recognize teachers as important contributors to conversations about inclusive education and professional development.

What We Found

With the survey data obtained from teacher samples in Singapore and Mainland China, we found that overall, mean scores on all three questionnaires were high, suggesting that teachers in both contexts expressed perceived strengths in building supportive learning environments, instructional planning, and responding to student needs. Figure 7 reports the total scores for each measure. Several domains had a lower mean score. These were areas related to policy knowledge, adapting instruction to students’ cultural backgrounds, and specialized intervention practices, suggesting that these could be areas of development in both contexts. Figures 8 and 9 show the top five and bottom five scoring items for Mainland China.

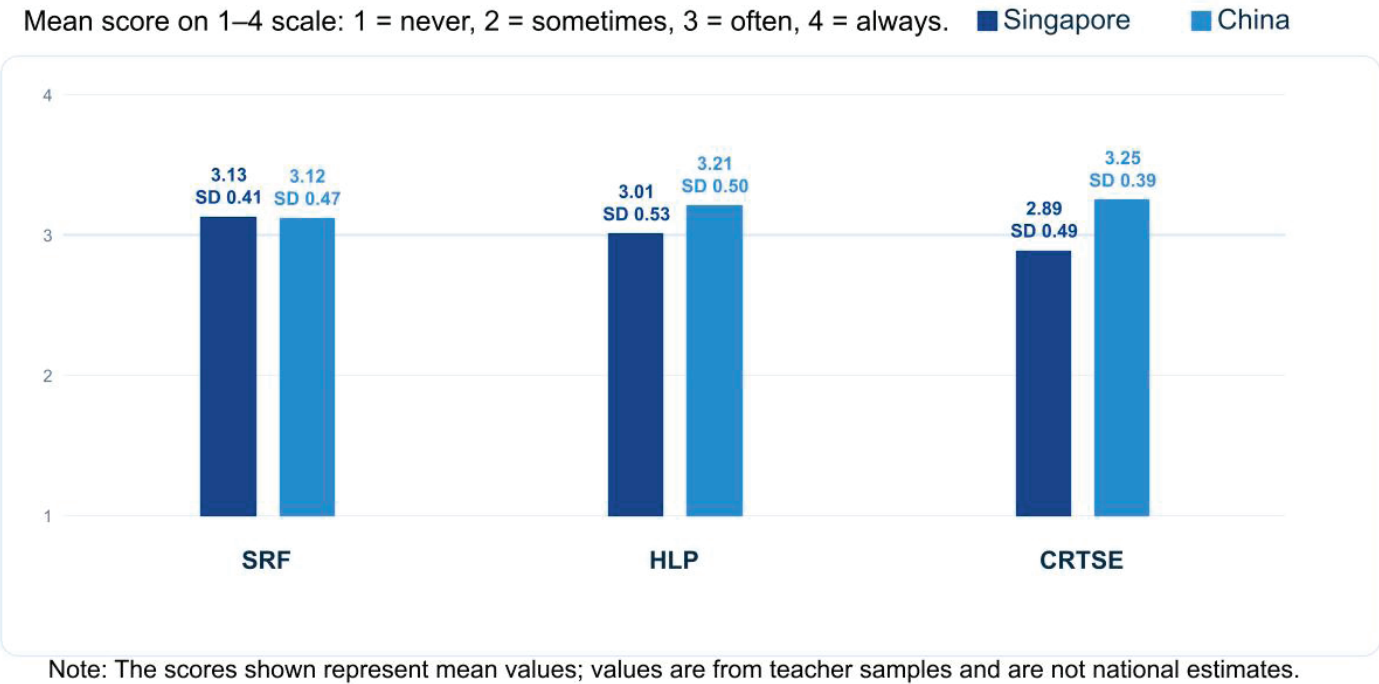


Figure 7. Mean scores for each questionnaire for Mainland China and Singapore

Mainland China

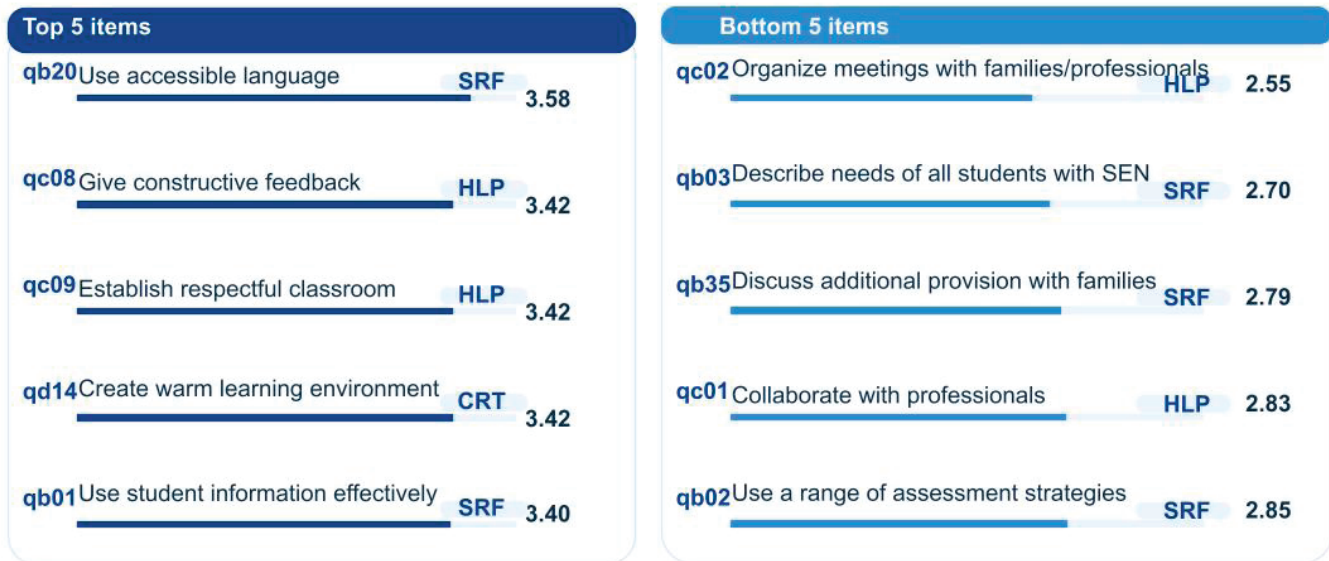


Figure 8. Top five and bottom five survey items for Mainland China

Singapore

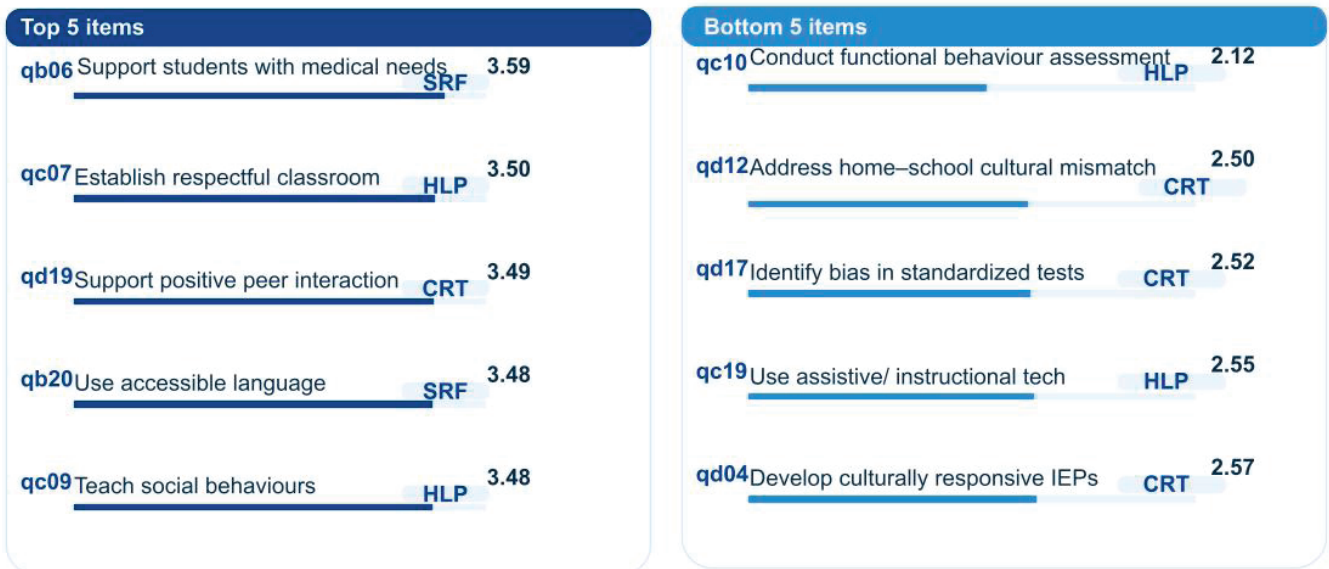


Figure 9. Top five and bottom five survey items for Singapore

We conducted multiple regression analyses separately for the Mainland China and Singapore samples to examine whether the available demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, years of teaching experience, school level, and participation in professional development during the previous year) were predictors of perceived competence. In Singapore, we did not find any strong relationships. In the Mainland Chinese sample, we found that only teaching experience ($\beta = .499$, $t = 2.80$, $p = .008$) and holding a master's rather than bachelor's qualification ($\beta = .601$, $t = 2.23$, $p = .032$) were positively associated with perceived competence. The small sample sizes of the two contexts (48 and 43 from Mainland China and Singapore respectively) could explain why further significant relationships were not observed.

The survey findings also provided a starting point for interpreting the qualitative accounts from the three contexts by helping to explain how school structures, professional relationships, parent expectations, and teachers' day-to-day experiences shaped perceived competence.

Four key themes emerged from our combined analysis across the quantitative and qualitative data. Together, they move progressively from the wider education system toward the everyday conditions that shape inclusive practice. The first theme, translating inclusive policy into classroom practice, examines how broad policy commitments are interpreted and enacted in schools. The second, recognizing and responding to learner diversity, moves closer to teachers' daily work by exploring how they identify and respond to students' differing needs. The third, strengthening professional learning for inclusive practice, looks more deeply at the knowledge, experience, and learning opportunities that help teachers respond with confidence. The fourth, creating enabling school cultures and parent partnerships, situates these practices within the relationships and school conditions that allow inclusion to be sustained.

Translating Inclusive Policy into Classroom Practice

Across the three contexts, teachers recognized inclusive education as an important goal, but

implementation varied across schools and systems. In Hong Kong, inclusive values were a central theme in the discussions we had, but we heard that it was challenging to implement these. An international school teacher in Hong Kong told us, "I think it's important that we just recognize the increased levels of ... challenge that we have within the school." In focus groups in Singapore we heard how schools valued having the flexibility to interpret broader policies in ways that responded to their own students and circumstances. Teachers described how school-level data could be used to identify emerging needs and adjust practice accordingly.

For example, a secondary school teacher ran a survey with his students and found that with an increasingly diverse classroom, he needed to put in greater effort to cultivate a sense of belonging to the class. On his efforts to organize stronger peer groupings, he said "We do see that the sense of belonging is stronger now, but we also see the negative behaviour compounded." This example shows how teachers use local evidence to adapt the implementation of broader inclusion policies. It also illustrates how changes that improve students' sense of belonging can also create new challenges. The issue is therefore not simply a lack of policy clarity. Teachers need sufficient professional judgment, data, time, and support to reflect and review their decisions and refine their approaches.

Recognizing and Responding to Learner Diversity

The gap between policy and practice became especially evident when teachers described trying to identify and respond to students whose needs were not yet clearly understood. Teachers often noticed student needs before formal identification had taken place. These could include learning, behavioural, communication, emotional, or social needs. In practice, teachers sometimes had to begin supporting students before there was a diagnosis. As a primary school teacher in Singapore put it, "We guess (and) guess, based on the symptoms and all the signs."

Support often came before diagnosis, and teachers relied on observation, experience, informal advice, and discussions with colleagues.

“The diagnosis just seems like ... the diagnosis itself is not that important ... And it seems like we just ... adjust to the kids’ needs.” (International school teacher in Hong Kong)

“I think it’s getting the right support for the pupils. And when teachers can see that’s really made a difference, then of course, confidence increases.” (Another international school teacher in Hong Kong)

This sentiment was reflected in the survey data as well. For example, in Singapore, teachers rated understanding their role in working with students yet to be formally diagnosed relatively positively (Mean = 3.36, SD = 0.58).

However, the reality that teachers face is often complex, especially when a student’s needs are not easily identifiable:

“Even when my eldest suspended their schooling, the teachers still hadn’t identified what the problem was.” (Parent in Mainland China)

“We have gone through a lot of screening and then a lot of interviews ... but still, still, I don’t know why. Why is this child behaving like that ... I want to know the reason, so that I can help the child.” (Primary school teacher in Singapore)

While diagnosis can help unlock support, support cannot wait for diagnosis.

“Being diagnosed doesn’t equal to the kind of optimal outcome we want ... to put them in baskets of (those who are) ‘diagnosed’ (and) ‘not diagnosed’. To me, it is meaningless. (We need) more of the strategies that we (can) use in school.” (Another primary school teacher in Singapore)

Teachers’ confidence appeared to grow when they understood the student profile and could relate information about needs to practical classroom action. It also showed how experience could shape

confidence. Teachers often drew on prior encounters with students, informal professional knowledge, and advice from colleagues when formal identification was incomplete. However, reliance on experience alone could lead to uneven practice where teachers had different levels of exposure or support. Teachers needed guidance on what they could do before, during, and after identification. Parents/caregivers also needed reassurance that identifying needs was more about making support clearer and more consistent than labelling a child negatively.

Strengthening professional learning for inclusive practice. The findings on identification raised a wider question about how teachers developed the knowledge and judgment needed to respond to diverse and changing needs. Our survey revealed a textured perspective on professional learning and development’s effect on teachers’ perceived competence in implementing inclusive practices. In general, teachers across the three contexts felt able to give clear instructions, structure lessons, and monitor understanding. They were less confident when they had to differentiate more complex needs or adapt for cultural diversity.

“It can be difficult to figure out how to ... work with a child who maybe has more distinctive needs.” (Another international school teacher in Hong Kong)

Our qualitative findings also revealed that inclusion often requires teachers to adjust what is ordinarily available in the classroom so that more students can take part meaningfully.

Teachers in both Mainland China and Singapore suggest that the presence of training in the past year was not enough. In Mainland China, recent training appeared more closely linked to perceived competence in one area, describing student needs (among those with training in the past year, the average score was that they were able to describe student needs “often” vs an average of “sometimes” among those without recent training in the past year). Singapore presented a different pattern. Professional development in the past year showed almost no relationship with perceived competence, as teachers in both groups showed high levels of overall competence. The form, relevance, and

application of training may therefore matter more than attendance itself.

The qualitative findings supported this. Hong Kong teachers had access to specialized internal and external professional development, which they found useful:

“So if a teacher ... says that I’ve got this pupil in my class, there might not be a diagnosis, but I’m seeing this, this, and this. There’s usually then some sort of resource there that they can then go (to) and it’s very evidence-based ... so you know that it’s a good source rather than just searching online.” (International school teacher in Hong Kong)

“I think it was collectively felt that this was one of the most positive — like really practical — experiences.” (Another International school teacher in Hong Kong)

However, teachers wanted more internal professional development. At a participatory workshop in Singapore, teachers raised the usefulness of an open classroom approach — they saw value in observing experienced colleagues, discussing authentic classroom problems, and seeing inclusive strategies demonstrated authentically. This was mirrored in Hong Kong and Mainland China too:

“I can’t, like, people [colleagues] will tell me, *oh, turn it in this way, say it, like — say it like this*. I can’t do it. I need to see a modelled example (of classroom strategies/practices).” (International school teacher in Hong Kong)

“Compared with purely theoretical lectures, front-line teachers’ experience of supporting children with additional needs was easier to understand, more practical, and included concrete strategies.” (Teacher in Mainland China)

Teachers in the Singapore focus groups were generally positive about previous training,

particularly where it had built awareness of SEND. They also recognized that continued learning was important because students’ needs changed over time. A primary school teacher in Singapore explained: “Because of the variety of conditions that are coming now, we also need to be learning about them ... training cannot stop ... It is about being exposed to different strategies and possibilities.”

However, teachers in Singapore also wanted future training to include more real-life examples, case studies, practical strategies, and opportunities to observe experienced teachers using these approaches in classroom settings. A primary school teacher there told us “I can learn a lot of strategies, but if I don’t have the opportunity to apply them, I won’t see their effectiveness. I also won’t retain the knowledge from the training.”

Teachers’ preferred model of professional learning was strongly practice-based. This aligns with Bandura’s view that self-efficacy is strengthened through mastery experiences, observing others succeed, and receiving constructive social support. Open classrooms, authentic problems, peer brainstorming, and modelling by experienced colleagues were identified during the participatory workshop as useful tools to connect general knowledge about SEND with decisions teachers had to make in real classrooms. These forms of professional learning gave teachers opportunities to see inclusive strategies enacted, try them in context, and build confidence through supported practice rather than abstract instruction alone. Opportunities to share best practices and receive support from colleagues also appeared to strengthen teachers’ confidence.

Professional development could therefore go beyond general awareness of SEND to supporting with practical classroom strategies. Teachers shared strategies that they found useful over the years: routines, emotional regulation, visual scaffolds, task adaptation, participation, and parent communication. More experienced teachers could be encouraged to mentor younger teachers in these areas.

“I have a student with selective mutism ... I did a role play where she’s taking the role of the freeze frame, and the group

members describe ... to bring her in as someone in the group.” (example of a task adaptation shared by a primary school teacher in Singapore)

“I close my eyes and I do very heavy chest breathing. I ... literally show like that ... I think with enlarging actions, he is able to detect (emotions) better recently.” (example of emotional regulation strategies used by another teacher in Singapore)

The data we collected from Mainland China also suggests strong regional differences in teacher qualification profiles: 17 per cent of participants from Zhejiang were postgraduate qualified, compared to 100 per cent for participants from Beijing. This may reflect broader regional differences in teacher recruitment and professional expectations, particularly given Beijing’s role as the national capital, where schools often face higher qualification expectations, greater policy visibility, and stronger access to professional development opportunities compared to other regions.

While our Beijing sample leans heavily toward teachers with postgraduate qualifications, data from Mainland China’s Ministry of Education show a smaller but statistically significant difference between the two regions (8.7% in Beijing, vs 6.43% in Zhejiang).¹⁸ Our findings also revealed that teachers with postgraduate qualifications also appeared to report higher levels of perceived competence in several areas of inclusive practice. Taken together, these findings show what kinds of professional

development could better prepare teachers and schools.

Creating Enabling School Cultures and Parent Partnerships

Even well-designed professional learning depended on whether schools created the time, relationships, and expectations needed for teachers to use what they had learned. This places school culture and parent partnership alongside training as central conditions for inclusive practice.

Across all three contexts, inclusion was shaped by what schools valued. In academically demanding systems like those in the contexts we studied, teachers had to balance inclusion with curriculum coverage, assessment, parent expectations, and future pathways. A supportive school culture overcomes this dilemma by giving teachers confidence that inclusive practice was a shared responsibility. A primary school teacher in Singapore articulated this well: “I feel that all our effort cannot be possible if the school culture didn’t allow us to do that ... in terms of language, our actions, and the way we teach, and our expectation, right? Actually, there is a very low emphasis on just numerical score.”

School culture enables inclusion when teachers feel supported by colleagues, have opportunities to discuss student needs, and share responsibility for support. It could become a barrier when assessment demands, large classes, selective academic expectations, and limited time reduce teachers’ ability to adapt provision. Our study therefore points to the need to examine how assessment, curriculum pacing, class size, and definitions of success influence inclusion.

Home–school partnership also proved to be central. Teachers needed parents/caregivers to understand support needs early. Parents/caregivers needed schools to communicate clearly, respectfully, and without stigma. This was especially important in contexts where SEND labels carried social pressure. In a social context that highly values “face” and normalized integration, special needs are often

“

Across all three contexts, inclusion was shaped by what schools valued.

18 “Number of Full-Time Teachers in Special Education by Academic Qualification and Professional Rank,” [in Chinese] Ministry of Education, China. [↗](#)

internalized by parents as an unspeakable “flaw,” acting as a defensive mechanism to protect their children from social exclusion. The fear of stigmatization profoundly impacts the transparency of home–school interactions, as two parents in Mainland China illustrated:

“At first, when he was self-harming, I didn’t tell the teacher. I would feel very embarrassed. Also, I’m afraid that if others find out, they’ll look at my child differently.” (Parent in Zhejiang, Mainland China)

“If I sincerely report to the teacher, it won’t change anything; instead, it might be harmful to the child.” (Parent in Beijing, Mainland China)

Consequently, this strategy of concealment and mistrust often drives a strong tendency toward “de-labelling.” Even when schools are equipped with inclusive facilities, parents may proactively forfeit their use out of a fear of being “specialized.” One parent in Hangzhou, Mainland China, explicitly stated: “I want him to be normal, to be similar to ordinary children, so I don’t want him to use the resource room.” To circumvent these labels, some parents exhibit psychological resistance to diagnoses altogether, seeking alternative explanations outside the school system. As another parent recalled, “A teacher online talked about ‘pseudo-autism,’ and at the time we also kept not wanting to admit the child was autistic, so we felt what he said seemed to make sense, and we went” (parent in Zhejiang, Mainland China).

While home–school partnership is increasingly recognized as an important component of inclusive education, teachers’ perceived competence and consistency in carrying out these practices remain uneven in everyday school contexts. We found that partnership is strongest where communication was respectful, two-way, and focused on shared problem solving. It can be weakened when communication seems hierarchical, if parents feared stigma, or when schools and parents hold different understandings of the child’s needs. An international teacher in Hong Kong told us “There’s some parents who see the bit of the stigma to having a label, particularly in the lower schools. It tends to take, in my experience, a little bit longer to kind of work with the parents and

build their trust and help them to understand the benefit of doing it.”

The findings may also point toward a gradual transformation in how teachers understand their professional role within inclusive education. The expansion of inclusive education policies across all three contexts can sometimes require teachers to take on broader relational and coordination responsibilities. As a result, many teachers currently find themselves in an in-between position: they are increasingly expected to enact collaborative and inclusive roles, while still operating within school systems influenced by performance pressures, hierarchical structures, and limited time for sustained relationship building.

Our interviews also revealed how students with SEND can experience success when strong home–school partnership is present. As a teacher from Mainland China explained when sharing a video of a student’s challenging classroom behaviours with their parents: “I sent the video to the parents, but not to question them. I approached it lightly. The family could support him at home, and I would continue working on it at school. We solved the problem together.”

Home–school partnership may not benefit only students and families directly but may also strengthen teachers’ own sense of preparedness and confidence within inclusive educational practice.

Remaining Questions

Future research could possibly include more parent perspectives and, where appropriate, student voices. Future action should help schools turn findings into practical change through better identification processes, school-based professional learning, stronger parent communication, more flexible assessment conversations, and clearer support structures for teachers.

Across the surveys, interviews, focus groups and participatory workshop, our samples were small and purposive. They provide initial insight into perceived competence in implementing inclusive education practices and wider teacher/parent experience of inclusion, rather than representative conclusions across the three contexts. Besides the relatively small

“

The expansion of inclusive education policies across all three contexts can sometimes require teachers to take on broader relational and coordination responsibilities. As a result, many teachers currently find themselves in an in-between position: they are increasingly expected to enact collaborative and inclusive roles, while still operating within school systems influenced by performance pressures, hierarchical structures, and limited time for sustained relationship building.



survey samples, we also did not collect or report detailed profile information for all participants for the qualitative component, which limits how far we can compare patterns within and across contexts, school types and levels of SEND support. Most research participants were female. This partly reflects the gendered nature of much of the teaching and care work for students with SEND across our three contexts as well. Future research could include larger and more diverse samples, including more male teachers to better understand how gender might shape teachers' perceived competence, roles, parent communication, and views of inclusive education, as well as how we might be able to harness potential characteristics of male teachers towards inclusive education.

Impact: Lessons Learned

The profound impact of this research lies in its comprehensive insights into inclusive education across diverse Asian contexts, spanning from multicultural international schools in Hong Kong to mainstream systems in Mainland China and Singapore. By capturing a holistic picture of educator readiness, the study serves as a catalyst for fundamental policy shifts across regional educational systems and significantly enhances teacher preparedness.

Our qualitative interviews amplified the voices of both teachers and parents, capturing authentic collaborative experiences that provide a critical counterpoint to top-down, macro-level policies. The quantitative survey data both confirmed the existence of these challenges and pinpointed specific areas of teacher strength, such as fostering supportive environments alongside critical gaps in specialized interventions. Crucially, the qualitative findings contextualize this data by revealing how educators' competencies are shaped by daily realities. Together, these methods illuminate key cultural nuances, demonstrating how intense academic expectations and parental anxieties over stigma uniquely complicate the implementation

of inclusive policies across these three regions. Under intense cultural pressure to maintain social “face,” parents often internalize special needs as an unspeakable flaw, leading to the active avoidance of special education labels and resources. This defensive culture of concealment ultimately reveals a deeper systemic mistrust that must be addressed to foster true, transparent home–school partnerships.

Our research exposes significant systemic gaps, most notably the critical disconnect between overarching policy intentions and everyday classroom execution. It suggests that educators may, to varying degrees depending on the country context, face uncertain conditions in which they need to respond to students before formal diagnosis and manage sensitive home–school communication, while still needing more practice-based guidance and support.



Figure 10. The research team tours the resource room at Ningbo Jiangbei Sanshuiwan Kindergarten

Beyond its broader findings, the research process itself yielded an immediate, localized impact on teacher reflexivity. During post-interview reflections, educators noted that the interviews provided a rare and vital space to celebrate their existing classroom strengths while identifying areas for professional growth. This feedback inadvertently highlights a critical systemic deficit: inclusive teachers in high-pressure Asian educational environments are frequently starved of the time and institutional

support necessary for deliberate reflection on their practice.

To address these deficits, future professional development must be strategically guided, site-based, and highly collaborative. This entails embedding structured opportunities for self-reflection, peer-to-peer dialogue, and the direct observation of experienced inclusive practitioners. Through its crucial regional synthesis, the research not only promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all but also significantly enhances educational outcomes and the psychological well-being of both educators and students with SEND across Asia.

Research Team



Zhanina Dimova is an MA student in special and inclusive education at University College London. She holds a BA in early childhood studies and a PGCE in early years education, with a professional background in early years and inclusive education. Her research focuses on teacher professional learning, inclusive practice, and understanding the barriers educators face when supporting diverse learners in mainstream classrooms. She is particularly interested in creating collaborative spaces that strengthen teacher voice, reflection, and agency within inclusive education. Zhanina is committed to advancing SDG 4 and supporting more equitable and meaningful educational experiences for children with diverse learning needs.



Enze Fang is an MA student in special and inclusive education at University College London. He previously completed a bachelor's degree in English at the University of Nottingham, where he developed interests in language, education, and social research. His current research focuses on inclusive education, teacher preparedness, and home-school partnerships for students with special educational needs in Mainland China. Enze has conducted fieldwork across multiple regions in China, working with teachers, parents, and educational organizations in both mainstream and special education settings. He is committed to advancing SDG 4 by promoting equitable and contextually responsive inclusive education practices. He brings strong qualitative research, communication, and cross-cultural collaboration skills to his work.



Benjamin Gan is an MA candidate in special and inclusive education at the UCL Institute of Education. He holds an MA in geography from the University of Cambridge, an MA in climate and society from Columbia University, and a postgraduate diploma in education from the National Institute of Education, Singapore. Benjamin brings experience in teaching, leadership, and school management across primary and secondary school settings, alongside broader policy work in the public sector. He has a strong interest in the intersection of research, policy, and classroom practice and is passionate about improving educational access and outcomes for all students. His current work and research focuses on advancing inclusive systems that promote meaningful support for diverse learners.



Hechang Jin is an MA student in special and inclusive education at University College London. Holding a bachelor's in early childhood education, she brings extensive inclusive teaching and volunteering experience across Mainland China and the UK. Trained as a family education guide and children's emotional intelligence instructor, her core interest lies in social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH). Her research explores home-school partnerships, empowering mainstream teachers with family guidance skills to better support students with special educational needs and their families. Committed to advancing UN SDG 4,

Hechang leverages qualitative research, empathy, and cross-cultural perspectives to drive systemic change in inclusive education.



Louise Mehrabian is an MA student in special and inclusive education at University College London. She also holds an MA in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), a PGCE in primary education, and a first degree in linguistics and English language. Louise is also currently head of SEND and EAL in an independent school in Oxford for pupils aged 7 to 18 years and has a particular interest in global and national policies on inclusive education. Louise is on the board of a private primary school in Kampala, Uganda, where she supports the development of whole-school provision for language and literacy and SEND.



Rebecca Saunders is an MA student of special and inclusive education (autism) at University College London. She has practical experience in inclusive education across Hong Kong and London, supporting students with SEND and diverse learning needs. Rebecca holds a bachelor of science degree in sociology from the University of Bristol where she contributed to social research. She has coordinated trauma-informed programs for survivors of human trafficking and has consistently worked in community-based roles focused on development and inclusion. She brings strong organizational and collaborative skills and has worked with diverse stakeholders.



Daisy Loyd is a lecturer in inclusive education and research methods at UCL Institute of Education. Daisy teaches in UCL's MA special and inclusive education, supervises master's and doctoral research, and trains educational psychologists. She is passionate about providing opportunities for practitioners to interrogate their own practice and develop their understanding and thinking about different needs. Daisy's research and consultancy centres on inclusive education and understanding the lived experience of children, young people, and adults with different needs to guide practice. She leads an expanding portfolio of research focused on strengthening teachers' competence in implementing inclusive education practices in different cultural contexts with collaborative partners in China, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States.



Zachary Walker is recognized as an expert in individual and organizational performance. He is an EMCC endorsed executive coach, a principal fellow with the Higher Education Academy, and a UK Graduate Council for Education recognized research supervisor. Walker began his career at Singapore's National Institute of Education where he spent five years in a variety of roles. He then moved to the University College London (UCL) Institute of Education where he spent five years as head of the Department of Psychology and Human Development. Over the past 15 years, he has worked with educators and policymakers in more than 40 countries on topics related to leadership, inclusion, and innovative practice.



University College London (UCL), founded in 1826, is a top-ranked research university known for its pioneering inclusivity and academic excellence. Located in central London, UCL offers a broad range of disciplines across 11 faculties, fostering a vibrant, diverse community from over 150 countries. Renowned for impactful contributions in fields like medicine, engineering, law, and social sciences, UCL emphasizes interdisciplinary research, sustainability, and social impact. Its prime location enriches student life with access to London's cultural, political, and business spheres, making UCL a hub for those committed to global change.
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk>



Founded in 1902, **Beijing Normal University (BNU)** is one of China's leading research universities and has a long-standing reputation for excellence in teacher education, educational research, psychology, and social sciences. As one of China's earliest institutions dedicated to teacher training and educational development, BNU has played an important role in shaping modern education in China. Its academic strengths in education, child development, psychology, and public policy make it a key institution for research and dialogue on inclusive and special education. For this project, Beijing Normal University provided valuable local academic insight and advisory support for the Mainland China component of the study.
<https://www.bnu.edu.cn>



Founded in 2008, the **Beijing Wise Home Education Technology Company** centre is a professional institution integrating research and development, education, and training. Driven by its founding mission to build a standardized "Home-School partnership" system, the centre seamlessly merges family, school, and social education into an innovative co-education model. It aims to elevate population quality by focusing on foundational personality development and family ecosystem building. In 2024, it initiated the "Spark Program," a practice-oriented educational project designed around the psychological and social growth of adolescents aged 10 to 18. In this project, the centre provided essential support and coordination for our fieldwork, playing a key role in connecting us with parents.



Ningbo Special Education Center School is a specialist educational institution in Ningbo, China, supporting students with special educational needs and disabilities. The school has played an important role in developing local special and inclusive education practice, including collaboration with mainstream schools and support for children with diverse learning needs. For this project, the school provided valuable support in facilitating fieldwork activities and enabling engagement with educators and practitioners in the Mainland China context.



香港教育大學
The Education University
of Hong Kong

The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK), is a publicly funded tertiary institution dedicated to the advancement of learning and teaching through a diverse offering of academic and research programs on teacher education and complementary social sciences and humanities disciplines. Renowned for high-impact pedagogical research and innovation, EdUHK cultivates a vibrant, diverse campus community. The university enriches student life with global perspectives, preparing future leaders committed to sustainable social and educational development.

<https://www.eduhk.hk/en/>



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

Founded in 1827, the **University of Toronto (U of T)** is Canada's leading institution of learning, discovery, and knowledge creation. One of the world's top research-intensive universities, its students learn from and work with pre-eminent thought leaders through a multidisciplinary network of teaching and research faculty, alumni, and partners. Consistently ranked among the top 10 public universities worldwide, U of T has remarkable strengths in disciplines that span the humanities, social sciences, sciences, and the professions. U of T's three campuses host 93,000 undergraduate and graduate students from 159 countries, who are taught by 15,000 faculty.

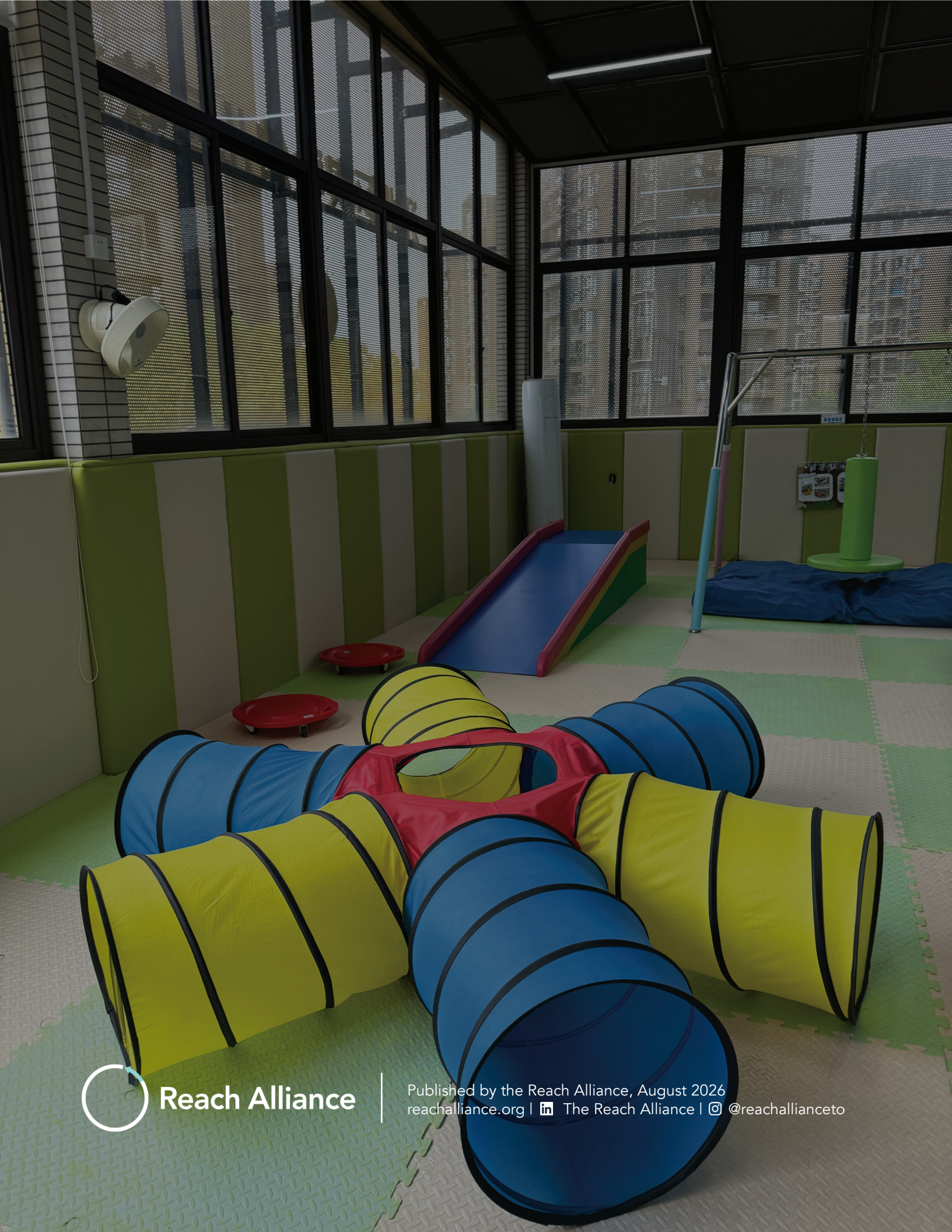
www.utoronto.ca



Center for
Inclusive Growth

The Center for Inclusive Growth advances equitable and sustainable economic growth and financial inclusion around the world. The Center leverages the company's core assets and competencies, including data insights, expertise, and technology, while administering the philanthropic Mastercard Impact Fund, to produce independent research, scale global programs, and empower a community of thinkers, leaders, and doers on the front lines of inclusive growth.

mastercardcenter.org



Reach Alliance

Published by the Reach Alliance, August 2026
reachalliance.org |  The Reach Alliance |  @reachallianceto