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EXAMINING THE CURRENT SITUATION OF INDIVIDUALIZED CURRICULUM PLAN (ICP) FORMULATION IN MALDIVIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the current situation of schools in preparing Individual Curriculum Plans (ICP) for students with complex learning profiles (SCLP) in the Maldives, particularly after the redefinition of ICP in 2022. The transition from IEP (Individualised Education Plan) to ICP ensures that students' learning is aligned with the curriculum objectives and competencies. While little is known about ICP development practise in the Maldives, this study provides insightful evidence on this issue enabling informed policy debates and recommendations on the current practises aimed at achieving inclusive education objectives. The study analyzed 2077 ICP documents from 213 schools and 622 of them were analysed in detail. It emphasizes the significant role ICPs play in supporting SCLP students, with over 80% of schools utilizing ICPs to offer support. However, several key issues in the ICP preparation process were identified, such as incomplete documentation, improper student placement in programs, and the lack of appropriate accommodations and assistive technology. The findings suggest that, while progress has been made in integrating ICPs into educational practices, there is still a need for further training, improved resources, and standardized guidelines to ensure the successful implementation of ICPs. By identifying the gaps in the current practices, this research offers the Department of Inclusive Education valuable insights to refine the ICP preparation process and improve educational support for students with complex learning profiles across the country.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Individualised Curriculum Plan (ICP), Students with Complex Learning Profiles, Maldivian Schools

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education in the Maldives became a key focus after the country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Disability Act in 2010. These commitments made the government responsible for ensuring equal educational opportunities for all children, including those with disabilities. In response, the first Inclusive Education Policy was adopted in 2013, targeting three groups: children needing additional learning support, children with special

needs, and children in special circumstances. Schools were required to develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for these students.

In 2018, the Inclusive Education Unit, originally part of the National Institute of Education (NIE) was restructured into the Department of Inclusive Education (DoIE) to better ensure equity and access to education. The department aims to make all schools in the Maldives centers of excellence, offering inclusive education for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or educational needs.

The Inclusive Education Policy was revised in 2021, shifting away from a medical model and emphasizing inclusion and equity. The term "students with complex learning profiles" (SCLP) replaced "children requiring an IEP," and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) was redefined as the Individual Curriculum Plan (ICP). The ICP serves as a comprehensive guide for students with SCLP, detailing their educational needs, accommodations, and support services.

Despite recent reforms and numerous in-service training sessions conducted in schools, major challenges persist in the formulation and implementation of Individual Curriculum Plans (ICPs). In many cases, ICPs are either incomplete or completely absent from the Fahivashi portal. The effectiveness of ICPs in inclusive education has been questioned by national educators and practitioners. In addition, it is often argued that inclusive leadership practices are not consistently or effectively implemented in schools leading to inadequate implementation of IE policies (Naseer & Hameed 2024). Factors such as negative attitudes among mainstream teachers, limited knowledge and skills related to inclusive education, insufficient policy awareness among school principals, inadequate resources, and poor physical conditions in schools (Kozikoğlu & Albayrak, 2022; Groh, 2021; Grimes et al., 2021; Estoninos, 2025) hinder the implementation of ICPs. Therefore, this evaluative study endeavours to delve into the current situation of ICP formulation in the Maldivian Schools and specifically aims to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the status of ICP formulation in Maldivian Schools
2. What are the strengths in the ICP documents developed and uploaded to the Fahivashi Portal?
3. What are the gaps and issues in the ICP documents uploaded to the Fahivashi Portal?

Research in the domain of inclusive education is scarce in the Maldives. Hence, studies in this area are paramount as it offers invaluable insights into inclusive education practices in the Maldives. This study provides evidence-based understanding of the current state of ICP development in the Maldivian schools facilitating policy recommendations to support the realisation of inclusive education goals. By identifying the gaps in ICP development, this research influences the policy, practice and professional development initiatives to enhance inclusive education in the Maldives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive Education Initiatives in the Maldives

Over the past 40 years Maldives education system has achieved notable milestones in terms of implementing Inclusive Education Practices. In 1985, Jamaluddin School, the first school in Maldives that gave access to formal education to the students with disabilities, commenced a special education programme for the students with hearing impairment. Educational opportunities for the students with various kinds of disabilities have gradually increased since then, and in 2013 onwards all the students with disabilities have been given access to education (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Maldives, as being a signatory of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ratified the convention in 2010 and took remarkable steps to enhance inclusive education practices. These prominent steps include the enactment of the law on the protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Provision of Financial Assistance in 2010, ratification of the first IE Policy in 2013, enrolment of the National Curriculum Framework in 2015 (National Institute of Education, 2014) with principles focusing on IE, establishment of a designated department under the Ministry of Education in 2018, and promulgation of the first Education Act in 2020. The article number 8 in the Education Act (President Office, 2020) is obliged to ensure the rights of education to all students, and to provide equal and equitable opportunities for all categories of students with complex learning profiles

in pre-schools, primary schools, and secondary and higher education schools. In compliance with the Education Act, the Inclusive Education Policy was revised in 2021.

The Department of Inclusive Education (DoIE) was established in 2018 within the Ministry of Education by a decree of the then president of Maldives to promote access and equity in Maldives. The department aims to ensure the implementation of inclusive education policy in all the schools of Maldives, students with complex learning profile (SCLP) have access to education and develop their full potential through. In order to achieve this goal, DoIE develops policies, standards, programmes and curriculum related to inclusive education. The department is also responsible for providing necessary training to build teachers' and administrators' capacity to establish and enhance inclusive learning environments. In addition, the department conducts support and awareness programs to promote the dignity and rights of the SCLP.

Inclusive Education Policy Evolutions

The first Inclusive Education policy was formulated and enrolled in the year 2013 that mandated all Maldivian schools to enroll students with disabilities and establish special education programmes to cater the diverse needs of the students (Ministry of Education, 2013). This policy also offered special education teacher's job vacancies to work in schools and a policy decision was taken to create a minimum 1 SEN teacher slot in all Maldivian Schools. The policy prioritized special education programmes, where students with disabilities were catered in special education units most of their learning hours, and depending on the severity of the students. In addition, special education teachers took all the responsibilities for catering students with disabilities.

After the enactment of the Education Act in 2020, the IE Policy was revised in 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2021). This policy is defined as the guidelines, principles, roles and responsibilities for the implementation of all activities conducted within the mainstream system or through alternative learning pathways, to provide education for all categories of students with complex learning profiles, to the maximum of their potential. The objectives of this policy are to achieve the actions described in Article 8 (a)(b) and (c) of Act No.24/2020 (President Office, 2020) by providing opportunities to all the students with complex learning profiles to study in Maldivian schools as described in (d) of this article, and to describe the required standards and resources; 2. to outline the roles and responsibilities of the bodies involved in implementing the policy; 3. establish an education system with a conducive environment that facilitates equal opportunities for all categories of students described in this policy to acquire skills, play sports, and participate in extra and co-curricular activities. The Inclusive Education Policy document outlines the principles that underlie the provision of inclusive education, the classified categories of SCLP, the programmes and resources to be established in schools to provide inclusive education. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders, the referral system and how to assess, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the inclusive education policy in schools.

Formulation, Challenges and Implementation Practice of ICP

Individualized Curriculum Plan (ICP) refers to an official document that outlines the educational programmes for the Students with Complex Learning Profiles (SCLP) in Maldivian schools. It is an education plan adopted to the individual needs of each SCLP, and serves as the basis for teaching and learning of those students. The document is considered to be the best indicator of how and what the SCLP are taught in schools. According to the Queensland Teachers' Journal (2015), teachers develop ICPs to cater for the diverse learning needs of both students who perform well below and above their age level. Similarly, Victoria Point State High School (n.d) states that "An Individual Curriculum Plan is used to record curriculum decisions for students who are being provided a curriculum at a higher or lower level than their age cohort for one or more subjects" (page 1).

Individual Curriculum Plan (ICP) has been implemented in Maldivian schools since 2022 onwards, after the enrolment of the revised IE Policy in 2021. Before that, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) had been implemented in Maldivian Schools, right after the enactment of the very first Inclusive Education Policy in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2013). There was a huge debate among practitioners and educators in Maldives, in terms of the outcomes of the IEP implementation in schools due to its focus on developing students' adaptive skills instead of academic outcomes. The discrepancy

of IEPs were apparent once the National Curriculum Framework was enrolled in the year 2015 with a vision 'to prepare all students ready for life' (National Institute of Education, 2014), apart from embedding inclusive focus key components such as its principles, key competencies, pedagogical dimensions and assessments.

ICP formulated in the year 2022 was aimed to mitigate the bottlenecks of IEP and give ample opportunities for the Students with Complex Learning Profiles to achieve curriculum outcomes and key competencies apart from developing students' adaptive skills, hence the name was changed from IEP to ICP.

A recent qualitative case study done to identify teachers' preparedness, challenges and IE strategies used currently in a Male' school (Naseer & Hameed, 2024). The key findings depicted that lack of training for teachers, large class size, limited resources, unsuitable learning environment and poor collaboration between teachers and parents were bottlenecks faced by schools in the IE implementation process (Naseer & Hameed, 2024). A comprehensive mapping study conducted by UNICEF's Regional Office for South Asia including Maldives denoted unavailability of reliable and disaggregated data on students with disabilities was one of the major challenges faced in the region which hinders proper policy design and programme implementation (Grims, et al, 2021).

Global Perspectives on Inclusive Education and Individual Education Plan

A research conducted to validate a tool for evaluating Individual Education Plan recommended to training teachers to use Individual Education Plan (IEP) because IEP is an important tool for designing and implementing educational practices within the classroom for the students with disabilities including students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Roy, 2023; Akcin, 2022; Ruble, McGrew, Dalsymple, & Jung, 2011). The researchers further highlighted that IEP also ensures following appropriate procedures for the students with disabilities. Similarly, Roy, 2023 emphasised to have collaboration among stakeholders including teachers, parents, specialists and students to make IEP implementation more successful. In addition, the researcher recommended allocating adequate resources to implement IEPs, and streamline bureaucracy in the IEP implementation process, so that the challenges faced by schools can be eradicated (Roy, 2023; Akcin, 2022). Furthermore, a study conducted to identify how special education teachers plan IEPs and bottlenecks they come across revealed that special education teachers have awareness on IEP planning, assessing students' performance and drafting IEPs. However, the issues such as insufficient use of formal assessment tools, overreliance on informal methods, lack of consistency and collaboration in IEP team meetings, resource constraints, variability in teacher preparedness were identified (Akcin, 2022). To address these challenges the researcher recommended improving teacher training, collaboration and participation of stakeholders, allocation of resources and support infrastructure, and reviewing teacher education curricula (Akcin, 2022).

Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) examined 51 peer-reviewed studies between 1998 – 2014 on Individual Education Plan to examine past challenges, current practices and direction for policy reform. This review discovered weakly integrated assessment practices, lack of stakeholder participation, avoidance of students' voice, deficiencies in IEP content including students' present level of performance, clear goals, planning for transition, and inconsistent IEPs (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). The research suggested collaboration between stakeholders, use of assessment data for IEP goals, instruction and assessment; use of assistive technology thoughtfully; and taking measurable and individualized goals which are aligned with general education standards (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014).

A review report of education for students with disability in Queensland state schools explained the purpose of ICPs and its implementation challenges (Department of Education and Training, 2017). Teachers have to develop ICPs when adjustments are required for year-level expectations for the students with disabilities and the adjustments might be either lower or higher level for some or all learning areas (Department of Education and Training, 2017). This survey indicated that its respondents highlighted the benefits of ICPs as an appropriate tool for differentiation and inclusion, and also criticisms received from mainstream schools compared to special schools. The mainstream schools criticised for its administrative burden such as additional preparation time required for multiple ICPs in one school. Few special schools criticized highly focused academic goals of the Australian Curriculum and inflexibility of the ICPs (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was employed to collect and analyse data, allowing a deeper insight into the experience and practices involved in the ICP formulation in Maldives. By focusing on qualitative data, the research captures the subjective experiences, practices, and context-specific factors that influence ICP formulation, providing richer insights than quantitative data alone.

To gain an insight into the current state of ICP formulation, the document analysis method was utilized to collect and analyse data in this study. This method of analysis enabled the researcher to examine and evaluate the ICP documents used in the Maldives to teach SCLP (Specialized Curriculum and Learning Program). By reviewing the ICP documents, the researcher was able to paint a comprehensive picture of the strengths, gaps and in-consistencies in designing ICPs across Maldives. ICP documents are the best source of data that can be used to analyze the gaps in developing ICPs and, the involvement of many researchers in the analysis process allowed confirming the findings across the data thereby minimizing the possibilities for biases.

The 218 public schools in the Maldives were divided into 6 regions facilitating a more localized and targeted analysis. Each researcher was assigned a specific region from Region 1 to 5, where they analyzed the ICPs across all schools within that region. The schools in Region 6, the urban capital, Greater Male' area, are further divided, allocating 4 schools to each researcher. This regional breakdown allowed for a comparison of practices, while also acknowledging that local context (such as cultural, geographical, and resource-based differences) could have a significant impact on the formulation and execution of ICPs.

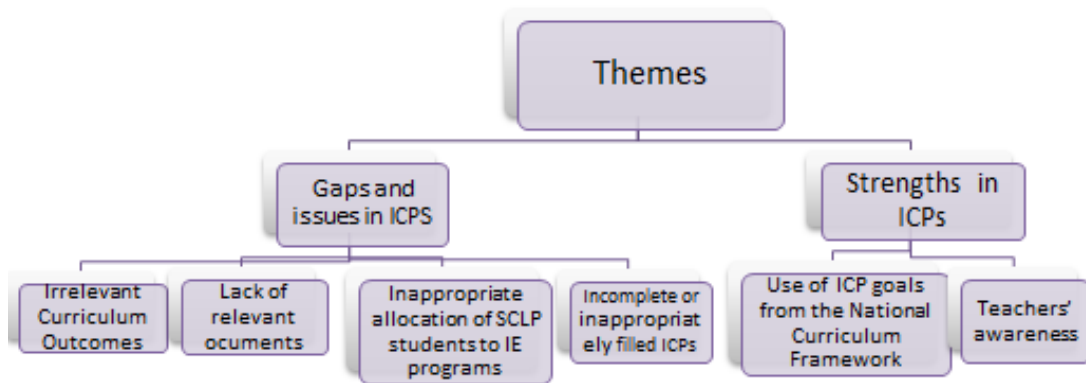
As stated by Bowen (2009), document analysis involves two levels of reading: superficial examination and thorough examination. So at first, all the ICPs uploaded to the portal were skim read by the researchers to get an overall gist of each ICP document and then, 622 ICPs were examined thoroughly to capture the details and identify the nuances and gaps in the ICPs. Considering the SCLP student population in the 213 schools, 1 to 8 ICPs were randomly selected for detailed evaluation, to ensure that all the schools are reflected and accurately represented in the research findings. The initial examination helped the researchers to collect quantitative data about the ICPs and fill in some of the categories in the table allowing them to do the analysis of the ICPs, including SCLP students' categories, their total number and the number of ICPs uploaded. The thorough examination enabled the researchers to analyse the ICPs in detail capturing the strengths, and gaps in the ICPs.

Content analysis method was used to organise the required information into a table consisting of the categories related to the research question. The categories or column labels in the table are used as predefined coding themes to ensure consistency between coders and to maintain inter-rater reliability in analyzing the ICPs. This categorisation also allowed the researchers to investigate the ICPs in detail and analyse the most important sections of the ICP and the main gaps in formulating the ICPS. Once the issues were identified by the researchers, the categories were further grouped into themes which describe the strengths and issues that overlap across the 218 schools in the country.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are organized based on the three research questions. The current situation of ICP development is presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 summarizes the themes developed from the thematic analysis in terms of the strengths and issues in the ICP documents.

Figure 1: Themes developed from the qualitative analysis



The current situation of ICP formulation

Table 1: The situation of ICP formulation in the six regions of the Maldives

RE GI ON	NO OF ATOLLS /CITIES IN THE REGION	NO: of SCHOO LS	TOTAL NO:OF SCLP STUDENTS ACCORDIN G TO THE DATA COLLECTE D FROM SCHOOLS	TOTAL NO:OF SCLP STUDENTS REG IN THE FAHIVASH I PORTAL	TOTAL NO: OF ICPS UPLOAD ED TO PORTAL	TOTAL NO:OF SCHOOLS WITH ICPS NOT UPDATED FOR 2024	NO:OF ICPS EVALUATE D IN DETAIL
1	3 Atolls	43	903	512	260	17	68
2	3 Atolls	40	537	367	188	13	146
3	6 Atolls	42	968	455	313	15	86
4	4 Atolls	37	698	392	197	29	86
5	4 Atolls	32	980	590	334	4	86
6	1 City	19	2154	989	785	4	150
		213	6240	3305	2077	82	622
%				52.97	33	38.5	30

In response to the first research question regarding the current status of ICP formulation in Maldivian schools, a quantitative analysis was conducted on the ICP documents, including the number of students with complex learning profiles (SCLP), the number of schools that formulate and update ICPs, and the total number of ICPs uploaded. The table 1 indicates the current state of ICP development in the year 2024. According to the results shown, out of the 213 government schools in the Maldives 82 schools did not update the ICPs to the portal. Moreover, there are notable discrepancies between the number of students registered in the portal and the official school data, illustrating that more than 50 percent SCLP students were not registered in the portal and only 33 percent of the students' ICPs uploaded to the portal.

Strengths in the ICP development

The second research question aimed to identify the strengths present within the ICP documents. Through qualitative analysis, two key themes emerged, reflecting the positive aspects of the ICP formulation and content.

Teachers' awareness

The fact that the majority of the schools have created and uploaded data to the Fahivashi portal once or twice over the past three years suggests that teachers and the school management possess a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the development of ICP. Moreover, it is identified that the majority of the ICPS uploaded to the portal have all the essential components such as students' strengths, developmental delays, the signature of ICP team, and medical history. This demonstrates that most teachers are well-equipped with the knowledge and competencies necessary to develop effective ICPs for SCLP students.

Taking ICP goals from the National Curriculum Framework

All the ICPs reviewed in this study revealed that schools take ICP goals by integrating the outcomes from the National Curriculum Framework. In addition, ICP goals are modified to cater diverse needs of the students, apart from considering literacy and numeracy as important academic areas in all the ICPs. However, schools need to focus on other compulsory subjects decided by the Ministry of Education.

Gaps and Issues in ICPs

The third research question focused on identifying the issues present in the ICP documents developed by the schools. The four themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the ICP documents are discussed in the following section.

Incomplete or inappropriately filled ICPs

Incompleteness of the ICPs is one of the most concerning issues identified in the evaluation. Despite the provision of a standardized ICP template by the Department and the availability of a comprehensive ICP Guide with clear instructions for completion, numerous ICPs were identified lacking critical components, including curriculum goals, intervention strategies, and the signatures of ICP committee members. At the same time there are few schools which used the old ICP format, and back dated ICPs, which have been filled for the students two to three years back. In addition to this, it was identified that many ICPS have incorrect information and are filled incorrectly.

Irrelevant Curriculum Outcomes

The learning and progress of SCLP students are highly dependent on clearly defined curriculum outcomes and the strategic interventions designed to achieve them. However, the ICP analysis reveals several concerns regarding the curriculum outcomes formulated for these students. In some cases, the

goals are misaligned with the students' current academic levels, while in others, they do not correspond appropriately to the students' competencies. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that teachers face difficulties in planning and implementing suitable interventions to support student development.

Lack of relevant documents

A well-developed ICP is supported by appropriate documentation, including medical reports, students' anecdotal records, observation forms, and recommendations from the Inclusive Education Committee. However, the findings clearly indicate that many ICPs lack essential supporting documents. In numerous cases, medical reports are missing for students with diagnosed conditions, and anecdotal records are not included with the submitted documents.

Inappropriate allocation of SCLP students to IE programs

A critical component of delivering effective inclusive education is the accurate identification and assignment of students to the appropriate Inclusive Education Program, based on the nature of their disabilities or developmental delays. However, the analysis of the ICPs reveals that a significant number of students have been placed in programs that do not align with their individual needs, highlighting a lack of capacity among educators to select suitable programs. For instance, some students who demonstrate the ability to succeed in mainstream education with differentiated instruction have been unnecessarily assigned to the Inclusive Readiness Program. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that many students are not allocated adequate instructional hours, thereby limiting their opportunities for academic growth and overall development.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of evaluating the ICPs is to understand the gaps in developing the ICPS across Maldives. The findings will be used to plan and implement a framework for supporting the schools to combat these issues in ICP development thereby improving the current inclusive education practices in the schools.

Similar to many other countries, Inclusive Education has been the core of discussion in the Maldives education sector over the past few years and the ICP serves as one of the most significant and main educational strategies used in inclusive education (Elder et al., 2018; Timothy & Agbenyega, 2018). The findings of this study clearly revealed that teachers and schools are well positioned to implement ICPs as all the schools were oriented on implementing ICPs via physical and online sessions and to mitigate challenges and drawbacks, an ICP guideline and video presentation were developed and shared with all the schools (Department of Inclusive Education, 2022). All the schools taking ICP goals from the NCF showed that the main objective for developing ICPs in Maldives has been achieved because the reason for the transition from IEP to ICP is to provide academic opportunities for the SCLP instead of focusing on adaptive skills firstly before moving on academic goals.

Researchers such as Kozikoğlu and Albayrak (2022), have identified the importance of teachers' knowledge in each stage of ICP development. Despite the many training and support provided, the teachers still need guidance on how to formulate the ICP properly. A study done by Shao et al (2022) on Inclusive practices further indicated that teachers have insufficient knowledge in inclusive education and ICP development. Teachers not only face challenges in identifying the disabilities and categorizing the students into various programs but also in developing correct curriculum goals and intervention for the students. This finding is consistent with the previous studies that report mismatch between SEN children's needs and ICP goals and support services or interventions. Shao et al. (2022), Musyoka and Clark, (2017) and Bateman (2011) stated the reason for less irrelevant goals is the teachers' lack of ability to understand the students' disabilities, interests, strengths and academic level. In the Maldives, the persistent shortage and high turnover of special education teachers continue to pose significant challenges in inclusive education. The recruitment of untrained and temporary (relief) teachers further underscores the need for ongoing in-service training, which is compounded by geographical barriers that hinder access to schools in remote islands.

Thus, a one-time training session is not sufficient for all the teachers to be fully equipped with the knowledge and skills required to develop the ICPs. A continuous collaboration and support from the school leadership, and other professionals are crucial to properly develop ICPs and implement them in schools. The school leadership must bring a systemic transformation that not only provides resources and training but also articulates a clear vision for an inclusive culture that values diversity and individualized needs of SCLP students providing equitable access to resources and support services tailored to their individual needs. Hence, inclusive education requires a shift from a one-size fits all approach to a more human rights and student based approach to provide quality and equitable education to all.

CONCLUSION

Transition from IEP to ICP is one of the pivotal initiatives taken by the Department of Inclusive Education after the endorsement of the revised IE Policy in 2021. Despite great efforts put in to implement ICPs in Maldivian schools, this study indicated that there are setbacks in implementing ICPs in schools in terms of completion of ICPs as per the ICP guideline, taking of irrelevant outcomes for students, lack of consideration on relevant documents, and allocation of students in IE programmes inappropriately. Regardless of these limitations, the study revealed meaningful insights in the ICP execution in Maldivian schools such as the stakeholders' consideration of NCF for taking ICP goals and implementation of ICPs for the SCLP, which are the core reasons of this crucial shift.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To review the current ICP format and bring necessary changes to it within the next quarter of this year to ease teachers in filling ICPs for each term.
- To deliver intensive in-person and online ICP training for the SEN teachers, mainstream teachers and leading teachers within this academic year.
- To inform schools to do ICP self-evaluation each year to make stakeholders more accountable for making ICPs.
- To facilitate parent awareness sessions by the SEN leading teachers each year, to make them aware of the vital role they could play in developing appropriate ICPs for students.
- To make sure schools conduct regular IE committee meetings and review ICPs each term to provide appropriate support to the students with complex learning profiles.
- To conduct annual central level monitoring of ICPs by the departments under the Ministry of Education including the Department of Inclusive Education, Quality Assurance Department, and School Administrative Division to make schools accountable and ensure provision of quality inclusive education programs.

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