

For information on
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**Legislative Council Panel on Education
Subcommittee on Integrated Education**

**Services for Students with Physical Disability
and those with Visual Impairment**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the identification and support services provided by the Government for students with physical disability (PD) and those with visual impairment (VI).

Background

2. PD refers to the disability caused by developmental delay, diseases of the central and peripheral neurological systems, traumas or other congenital diseases of the musculoskeletal systems, constituting a disadvantage or restriction in one or more aspects of one's daily activities. Cerebral palsy, spina bifida, spinal muscular atrophy, muscular dystrophy, amputation, osteogenesis imperfecta, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis are the main categories of PD in Hong Kong.

3. VI refers to a significant functional loss of vision which makes the vision of a person distinctly different from that of ordinary persons even with correction by medication, surgical operation, optical lenses (such as spectacles) or other improvement measures. Persons with VI can generally be classified into total blindness and low vision. Total blindness refers to a severe impairment of vision which results in almost total loss of visual function, while low vision refers to a significant reduction in visual acuity or severe loss of visual field which impairs normal vision. Persons suffering from refractive errors such as myopia, hyperopia and astigmatism who are able to re-gain normal or near-normal vision with correction by surgery or appropriate spectacles are not regarded as ones with VI.

4. Based on the records of the Education Bureau (EDB), the numbers of students with PD and those with VI attending public sector ordinary schools in the 2012/13 school year are as follows:

	Primary schools	Secondary schools
PD	130	250
VI	30	100

5. As regards the tertiary education level, according to the information provided voluntarily by individual students pursuing full-time sub-degree and undergraduate programmes, there are 34 students with PD and 43 students with VI in the 2012/13 school year¹.

Identification and Assessment Mechanism

6. For children with developmental disorder, early identification is the first and critical step towards effective intervention. Hence, the Government has established an effective system for the early identification and assessment of these children. The Department of Health (DH) offers an “Integrated Child Health and Development Programme” for children from birth to five years old through its 31 Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) across the territory. The health and developmental surveillance component of the Programme includes physical examination of newborn children, periodic monitoring of growth parameters, otoacoustic emission (OAE) test for newborn children and vision screening tests at the age of four, with a view to facilitating early identification of developmental disabilities that are born or developed at an early age. The MCHCs also offer relevant guidance to parents through its pamphlets on child development and parenting as well as other information to involve parents in the monitoring their children’s growth and development.

7. Furthermore, the DH, the Hospital Authority (HA), the EDB and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) jointly launched a Head Start Programme on Child Development in 2005, now known as the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS). The programme provides teachers of pre-primary institutions with a mechanism to refer at-risk children with

¹ Excluding students pursuing non-UGC funded sub-degree/degree programmes.

physical, developmental or behavioural issues to the MCHC of their respective districts for assessment, and appropriate treatment and support. Under the CCDS, a referral and reply system has been developed and implemented in all pre-primary institutions since 2008. A Behaviour Management - Teacher Resource Kit was also prepared by the DH in collaboration with the EDB and the SWD to enable kindergarten teachers to have a better understanding about the CCDS operation and referral system, and enhance their knowledge of common pre-school developmental and behavioural issues to facilitate early identification and referral of children in need for assessment and treatment.

8. As regards students in primary and secondary schools, the DH introduced the Student Health Service (SHS) in 1995 for conducting annual physical health assessment for students. If students are found to have physical or visual problems which require specialist assessment or diagnosis, the SHS will refer them to specialist clinics under the HA for further diagnosis and treatment.

9. Parents who suspect their children to have any physical or visual problems should take them to the MCHCs, paediatric department in hospitals or private practitioners for examination. If necessary, their children will be referred to the Child Assessment Centres (CAS) of the DH or specialist clinics for further assessment.

Support Services

Medical Services

10. The CAS of the DH provides interim support services for parents, such as parenting programmes, workshops and practical training, etc. to enhance their understanding of their children and facilitate early intervention. The assessment team of CAS will arrange rehabilitation services for these children according to their individual needs and family circumstances after diagnosis. Subject to the consent of parents, the CAS will refer pre-school children in need to receive pre-school rehabilitation services subvented by the SWD. As for school-age children, the assessment report will be delivered, via the EDB, to the special schools or ordinary schools to which the children are admitted so that the schools can provide special educational support for

the children in need. The CAS will also provide an assessment summary to the parents for their onward submission to schools to facilitate school personnel to take note of the educational needs of the children concerned and provide them with timely support.

11. The professional teams of the HA provide appropriate treatment and training to children with PD and those with VI, with a view to enhancing their ability in communication, socialization, emotion management, problem solving, learning and life skills, etc. Knowledge about PD and VI is also provided to the parents and carers of children with PD and VI in order to enhance their understanding of the symptoms and treatment needs of the children. In addition, the HA's professional teams maintain close liaison with related organisations, such as early training centres or schools, to provide appropriate support according to the developmental needs of the children.

Rehabilitation Services

12. The SWD provides children with disabilities from birth to six years old, including those with PD and those with VI, with early intervention through pre-school rehabilitation services, with a view to enhancing their physical, psychological and social developments, thus improving their chances of participating in ordinary schools and daily life activities, and helping their families meet their special needs. For details, please visit the website of the SWD at

http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_rehab/sub_listofserv/id_serp_resch/.

13. The Government has been continuously increasing the provision of pre-school rehabilitation places. Over the past six years, the Government has allocated funding to provide about 1 500 additional places, representing an increase of nearly 30%. There are currently a total of 6 230 pre-school rehabilitation places. The SWD anticipates that about 607 additional places will come on stream in 2013-14. Furthermore, the Community Care Fund launched an assistance programme on "Training Subsidy for Children who are on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services" in December 2011, with a view to providing training subsidy at a maximum of \$2,500² a month for pre-school children from low-income families who are in

² Starting from 1 May 2013, the maximum of the subsidy has been increased from \$2, 500 to \$2,615 a

need of rehabilitation services, thereby enabling them to receive self-financing services operated by the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and facilitating their learning and development. Moreover, the SWD, through its District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities, provides one-stop support and training services for persons with disabilities (including children with disabilities) living in their respective geographical districts to facilitate their integration into the community, and provides training, educational courses, talks, workshops, etc. for their carers so as to enhance their caring ability. In addition, the Parents/Relatives Resource Centre also organises social and recreational activities for parents/carers of children with disabilities to facilitate experience sharing and mutual support.

Education Services

Additional Resources

14. To help public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools support their students with special educational needs (SEN), including those with PD and those with VI, the EDB has been providing schools with additional resources on top of the regular subvention for ordinary schools, including Learning Support Grant (LSG), Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant, Top-up Fund for purchasing special furniture and equipment or carrying out minor conversion work for students with disabilities (including construction of ramps, conversion of toilets or procurement of tailor-made desks and chairs for students with PD, and purchase of suitable assistive tools for students with VI) and provision of additional teachers to cater for the needs of the low academic achievers, etc. With effect from the 2013/14 school year, the EDB will raise the ceiling of the LSG from \$1 million to \$1.5 million per school per year to further strengthen support for schools having admitted a larger number of students with SEN. Schools may pool and flexibly deploy the resources to employ additional teaching staff or assistants and procure professional services so as to enhance the learning effectiveness of the students with SEN.

Barrier Free Access Facilities

15. The Government requires that all new schools built in May 1997 or thereafter comply with the Design Manual on Barrier Free Access promulgated

month.

by the Buildings Department for the provision of barrier free access facilities for persons with PD, including lifts, ramps, bridges connecting the school section, toilets for persons with disabilities, handrails and signage, etc. For schools built before May 1997, when circumstances allow, additional facilities will be installed through conversion or improvement works for schools with a view to providing a barrier free learning environment for students with PD.

Resource Support Programme for Students with VI

16. To better support students with VI attending ordinary schools, the EDB has launched the Resource Support Programme for Students with VI (RSP) since 1979. Under the Programme, the EDB provides resources for the school for children with VI (VI School) to employ resource teachers (RTs) and braillists who would provide necessary services to students who have moderate to severe low vision or total blindness in ordinary schools. The services include regular school visits by RTs to follow up on the learning of students with VI, render personal guidance for the students, rehabilitation training, training on the use of assistive aids and braille transcription services, etc. Professional advice on support strategies, teaching approaches and special examination arrangements is also offered to teachers in ordinary schools in order to enhance the learning effectiveness and personal development of the students with VI.

Centralised Braille Production Centre

17. Since 1986, the EDB has been providing subvention to the Hong Kong Society for the Blind for the operation of the Centralised Braille Production Centre (CBPC) which produces braille reading materials for students with VI. At present, braille textbooks and reference books used by students with VI attending public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools are produced by the CBPC under the coordination of the VI School. Apart from producing embossed braille textbooks, the CBPC also makes available electronic braille version of these textbooks online for lending to its student members via the Braille eBook Reservation System. Students may also download braille newspapers, magazines and borrow other braille textbooks, reference books, English-Chinese dictionaries or leisure reading materials through the System.

Professional Support

18. The professional staff of the EDB pays regular visits to schools to render advice and assist schools in promoting an inclusive culture, as well as developing school-based inclusion policy and measures. The EDB has also made available a wide range of support services which include consultation for school staff on student support strategies, the learning progress of students and reviewing the effectiveness of support measures. Besides, school professionals, including guidance teachers, school social workers and educational psychologists, also provide support and guidance services for students with learning or adjustment difficulties, including students with PD and those with VI.

Teacher Training

19. Enhancing the professional capacity of teachers in catering for students with SEN is pivotal to the successful implementation of IE. From the 2007/08 school year onwards, the EDB has been providing serving teachers with structured training courses on supporting students with SEN pitched at Basic, Advanced and Thematic levels (BAT Courses). It is expected that a critical mass of teachers having completed the relevant training would be found in each ordinary school. Apart from having at least 10% of teachers attending the Basic Course, schools are required to arrange for at least three teachers to attend the Advanced Course. For schools having students with PD and/or students with VI, at least one teacher should attend the Thematic Courses on PD and/or VI. By the end of the 2011/12 school year, about 40% and 16% of teachers in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools respectively have received special education training on catering for students with SEN. The EDB has further raised the training targets of BAT Courses since the 2012/13 school year with a view to equipping more teachers with the knowledge and skills to support students with SEN. In addition, the EDB and the Hong Kong Society for the Blind have been co-organising a thematic seminars on “Support for Students with VI” annually since the 2008/09 school year to enhance the knowledge and skills of ordinary school teachers in supporting students with VI.

Special Examination Arrangements

20. Students with PD and those with VI pursuing the ordinary curriculum, like their counterparts, will sit for the internal school assessment and the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination. They need special examination arrangements to enable them to have equal opportunities to display their knowledge and skills in assessment. Appropriate assessment accommodation can help remove the barriers for students with SEN during examinations without changing the nature and contents of the assessment, or creating an unfair advantage over other students. Schools are required to formulate their school-based support policy, keep a list of students requiring support/support register and incorporate the internal special examination arrangements in school policy documents. Resources should be deployed to implement such arrangements. The relevant policies should be reviewed on a regular basis. In drawing up the school-based policy on special examination arrangements, the Student Support Team should consult the educational psychologists, subject teachers as well as teacher-in-charge of examination affairs, having regard to the learning progress and practical needs of the students with SEN.

21. As regards public examinations, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) will consider the recommendations of registered medical practitioners, or qualified specialists/professionals (e.g. ophthalmologist, optometrist, orthopedist, physiotherapist and occupational therapist) to provide special examination arrangements (SEA) for candidates with SEN, such as arranging special examination centres for the candidates, providing them with necessary assistance, provision of extra time allowance, use of visual aids, special means of presenting answers and exemption from part of the examinations, etc. Specifically, the HKEAA will provide braille/enlarged/special font size and word- and line-spacing question papers to candidates with VI and allow them to use ancillary aids such as braille/magnifier/CCTV/screen reader according to their needs. For candidates with severe VI, the HKEAA will provide text labels/descriptions, where possible, for questions that involve complicated pictures. Regarding candidates with PD, the HKEAA will arrange these candidates to sit for examinations at special examination centres with barrier-free access and facilities. The examination rooms in the special examination centres are usually accessible by lifts or on the same floor as the main entrance. In addition to regular SEA like extra time allowance, supervised breaks, special means of access to questions/presenting answers, the HKEAA will take into

consideration the physical conditions of the candidates and the recommendations of specialists/schools to provide suitable assistance to them, such as allowing these candidates to use a word processor to type the answers instead of handwriting, use of specially designed desks, chairs and/or writing aids, longer supervised breaks and receiving medical or relief treatment during the breaks. For details, please refer to the “Services to Special Needs Candidates” section on the HKEAA website (http://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/Candidates/Special_Needs_Candidates/).

22. The EDB has compiled the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach (WSA) to Integrated Education (IE)” (2010) and the “Special Examination Arrangements for Students with Special Educational Needs in Internal Assessment” (2009) to provide schools with the general principles and strategies on differentiated teaching and special examination arrangements. These guidelines have been uploaded onto the EDB website for teachers’ reference. The EDB invites teachers to attend seminars on differentiated teaching and special examination arrangements every year. Educational psychologists also deliver school-based teacher development sessions to enable teachers to have a more in-depth understanding of special examination arrangements.

Home-school Co-operation

23. Communication and co-operation between parents and schools are essential for supporting students with SEN. To enhance parents’ understanding of their roles, the EDB issued and uploaded onto its website the Parent Guide on WSA to IE in the 2008/09 school year, providing parents with information on the procedures for identifying and assessing different types of SEN, and on various support strategies. We also remind schools about the need to establish a systematic and regular communication mechanism for enhanced communication and co-operation with parents. Schools should also encourage parents to take part in the planning, implementation and evaluation of intervention programmes for their children, for example, by inviting parents to case conferences and reporting to them regularly the learning progress of their children, etc. Schools may organise education activities for parents of students with different types of SEN to strengthen home-school co-operation, thus boosting the support for students with SEN. For instance, parents will be able to adopt a more positive and accepting attitude when they are more aware

of the academic limitations of children with PD or VI, which is conducive to nurturing the independence of their children. We encourage parents to take the initiative to provide schools with information about their children's SEN as early as possible when they progress to Primary One or Secondary One. After admission, it is also advisable for parents to maintain co-operation and contact with the Student Support Team, class teacher and subject teachers so as to understand more about the learning progress of their children.

Cross-sector Collaboration

24. To enhance the effectiveness of the support for students with SEN, the EDB has arranged cross-sector collaboration to promote professional exchanges and create synergy. Other than collaborating with tertiary institutions in developing screening/assessment tools and teaching materials, the EDB has also attached importance to communication and co-operation with the education sector, professional organisations from other sectors and parents. By organising various promotional activities, we enhance public awareness of IE and promote the concept of inclusion. In the 2008/09 school year, "An Inclusive School – It All Begins with Our Hearts" IE publicity drive including video production and broadcasting contests was jointly organised by the EDB, the DH and the Subsidised Primary Schools Councils to allow teachers, students and parents to better understand and accept students with SEN (including those with PD and those with VI). In recent years, the EDB joined hands with Radio Television Hong Kong in a variety of productions, including the television programme "Parenting", "Featuring of Special Schools" as well as ETV programmes. The "Special Schools Variety Show" was staged at the Hong Kong Coliseum in Hung Hom to enhance public understanding and appreciation of the capabilities and talents of students with SEN. Last year, a major public event – "Learning and Teaching Expo 2012" – was held to highlight the development and achievements of IE. Apart from inviting local and overseas academics to give thematic talks and seminars, relevant government departments and statutory bodies, the NGOs, tertiary institutions, parent groups and schools also set up booths to showcase their services, teaching materials and ancillary equipment for supporting students with SEN, including those with PD and those with VI, so as to enable the sector, schools, teachers and parents to keep abreast of the latest development of IE.

Service Effectiveness

Early Identification and intervention

25. The CAS of the DH provides various educational activities for parents of children with SEN, organises or participates in educational seminars for the public. All these help enhance public awareness of children with SEN. As reflected from the post-workshop questionnaires by parents, these activities have achieved pleasing results.

Implementation of Integrated Education

26. The Administration has kept various IE measures under review on an on-going basis. In 2005, the EDB set up the Task Force on Integrated Education in Mainstream Schools (IE Task Force), which comprises representatives from the education sector (including representatives from various school councils), tertiary institutions, other government departments, NGOs and parent groups. Through regular meetings of the IE Task Force, the EDB discusses with stakeholders the development of IE and possible improvement measures. The EDB also, from time to time, meets with representatives from the NGOs, parent groups and school councils, etc. to directly gauge their views on the implementation of IE.

27. Under the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools are required to assess the effectiveness of their support for students with SEN through self-evaluation each year so as to be accountable to their stakeholders. To further enhance transparency, from the 2009/10 school year onwards, schools are also required to set out in their reports how resources are deployed to provide support services for students with SEN. Moreover, the EDB requires schools to submit a self-evaluation report on the implementation of the WSA to IE at the end of a school year. In parallel, the EDB will arrange for its professional staff to conduct regular school visits to ensure the effective deployment of resources for supporting students with SEN. After years of practice, there have been a number of successful cases of culture building, policy formulation and implementation.

Resource Support Programme for Students with VI

28. The EDB conducted a review on the RSP with the VI School in the school years of 2010/11 and 2011/12 with a view to further enhancing the effectiveness of RSP. A number of improvement measures have been put in place after the review, which include enhancing collaboration between RTs and their schools under the Programme, strengthening the transition services for leavers of the VI School, and providing more intensive school-based services for schools having admitted greater number of students with VI, etc.

Centralized Braille Production Centre

29. To enhance the efficiency of the CBPC on production of Braille textbooks, the EDB held a number of meetings with the CBPC of the Hong Kong Society for the Blind and related organisations in 2011 and 2012 to explore ways to expedite the process of producing printed Braille books for students with VI. With the concerted efforts of the various parties, in the 2011/12 and 2012/13 school years, except for special circumstances, such as some printed books being out of stock or change of the teaching schedule of the schools, the CBPC can basically provide braille books for the students with VI according to their schools' teaching progress.

Special Examination Arrangements

30. The HKEAA will review the SEA annually with a view to catering to the specific needs of SEN candidates. The proposals will be submitted to the Committee on Special Needs Candidates for consideration and approval. In conducting the review, the Authority will make reference to the applications processed and approved previously as well as the feedbacks and comments gathered from schools, parents and other parties concerned. The new SEA introduced by the HKEAA in recent years include allowing candidates who are educationally blind or have severe VI to use screen readers since 2010 and the provision of special font size and word- and line-spacing question papers to candidates with VI (including candidates with cortical VI) from 2013. Moreover, candidates with PD who are allowed to use a word processor to answer questions may also be provided with question-answer books in pdf format starting from the 2014 HKDSE Examination so that they can type the answers, write or draw directly on top of the pdf format question-answer books.

Advice sought

31. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Education Bureau

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