

For information
28 May 2019

Legislative Council
Joint Meeting of Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Education
Provisions of Speech Therapy Services for Elderly Persons, Persons
with Disabilities and Students with Special Needs

Purpose

Pursuant to the suggestion from some Members, the Panel on Welfare Services and the Panel on Education will convene a joint meeting on 28 May 2019 to discuss the captioned issue. This paper briefs Members on the speech therapy services for elderly persons, persons with disabilities and students with special needs provided by the Government.

Background

2. The Government attaches great importance to the well-being of elderly persons, persons with disabilities and children with special needs, and provides them with various kinds of support services at the community, residential care home and pre-school rehabilitation levels, including speech therapy services, to cater for their rehabilitation needs and to improve their quality of life.

3. Besides, the Government also accords priority to the care of students with special educational needs (SEN), including students with speech and language impairment (SLI). Oral language is a tool for communication and learning and is also the basis for reading and writing. If early identification and timely support are provided for students with SLI, it would help enhance their language and communication skills and allow them to learn and develop social skills more effectively. Therefore, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing School-based Speech Therapy Service (SBSTS) for students in need.

Speech Therapy Services Provided by the Government

(1) Elderly Service Units

4. The Government provides speech therapy services for Residential Care Homes for the Elderly (RCHEs), Day Care Centres and Units for the Elderly, and Home Care Services Teams to assist elderly persons with swallowing difficulties or speech impairment. To this end, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been allocating additional resources to non-government organisations since October 2018 to enable subvented service units to provide speech therapy services. In addition, SWD launched a pilot scheme in February 2019 to set up district-based multi-disciplinary professional teams, comprising speech therapists and other professionals, to provide outreaching services for residents of private RCHEs, contract RCHEs (including the Day Care Units for the Elderly attached thereto) and self-financing RCHEs. These services provided by the professional teams include speech therapy services. Furthermore, SWD has been allocating additional resources to organisations operating the Enhanced Home and Community Care Services since March 2019 to provide speech therapy services for those needy elderly receiving the services.

(2) Service Units for Persons with Disabilities

5. The four types of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services of SWD, namely Early Education and Training Centres (EETCs), Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs), Integrated Programme in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres (IP), and On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS), provide speech therapy services¹ to help the language development of the children with SEN at an early stage. In addition, SWD's Training Subsidy Programme for Children on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services covers speech therapy services run by recognised service providers on a self-financing basis. Starting from 2019-20, SWD will strengthen the staffing of speech therapist for each inter-disciplinary service team under OPRS.

6. Meanwhile, Multi-service Centres for Hearing Impaired Persons provide speech therapy services for persons with hearing impairment to help them improve articulation, voice and language. Starting from 2018-

¹ Speech therapists are included in the notional staffing establishment of the EETCs, SCCC and OPRS; speech therapy services under the IP in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres are provided by district-based speech therapy teams.

19, the Government has been providing speech therapy services at Support Centres for Persons with Autism to improve the communication ability of persons with autism. With effect from 2019-20, SWD will provide speech therapy services for elderly and persons with severe disabilities through District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities, Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities and Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities, so as to assist them in dealing with speech and swallowing problems.

7. Separately, starting from 2018-19, SWD has been providing speech therapy services in Hostels for Moderately Mentally Handicapped Persons, Hostels for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons, Hostels for Severely Physically Handicapped Persons with Mental Handicap, and Care and Attention Homes for Severely Disabled Persons. With effect from 2019-20, SWD will also extend speech therapy services to Care and Attention Homes for the Aged Blind, Long Stay Care Homes and Supported Hostels. Furthermore, SWD rolled out a pilot scheme in March 2019 to set up district-based multi-disciplinary professional teams comprising speech therapists and other professionals to provide outreaching services for residents of private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities.

(3) Schools

8. The Government adopts a dual-track mode in implementing special education. EDB will, subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and the consent of parents, refer students with more severe or multiple disabilities to special schools for intensive support services. Other students with SEN will attend ordinary schools.

Special Schools

9. On a need basis, EDB has been providing speech therapist posts to different types of aided special schools for rendering SBSTS to students. This is to enhance the care of the SEN of the students with SLI in school and to help them develop their language, communication and social skills. With effect from the 2017/18 school year, speech therapist posts have been provided for the school for children with visual impairment and schools for social development. At present, all special schools are provided with speech therapist posts, ranging from 1 to 6, according to the school type and the number of approved classes. The speech therapy service of the Hospital School is offered by the specialists of the related hospitals.

Ordinary Schools

10. On top of the regular subvention, EDB has been providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to help public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools to cater for students with SEN. At present, public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools will use the Learning Support Grant, Enhanced Speech Therapy Grant and other school resources provided by EDB to arrange SBSTS for student with SLI.

11. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, EDB will implement the Enhanced SBSTS by creating school-based speech therapist (SBST) posts in the public sector ordinary schools by phases in three years, enabling schools to form clusters and employ SBSTs to support students with SLI and students with other SEN, with a view to developing their communication, speech and language abilities through the domains of prevention, remediation and development. About 220 schools will implement the Enhanced SBSTS in the 2019/20 school year. Most of them will form clusters of two schools. One of the schools in each school cluster will be the base school, which is responsible for coordinating the administrative matters for the school clusters such as recruitment of SBST, arrangement of service of SBST of the cluster, and coordination of personnel and management of relevant administrative matters of the SBST posts. It is estimated that more than 100 SBSTs will be required.

Conclusion

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

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Education Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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