



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局
Education Bureau
Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
The People's Republic of China

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17 January 2020

Clerk to Public Accounts Committee,
Legislative Council Complex,
1 Legislative Council Road,
Central, Hong Kong
(Attn.: Mr Anthony CHU)

Dear Mr CHU,

Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 5 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 73
Special education

Your letters to the Secretary of Education dated 19 and 20 December 2019 on the captioned subject were well received. Please find the English version of our responses to the matters set out in Part (I) of the Appendix to your first letter. The Chinese version of our responses will be sent to you as soon as possible.

For enquiries, please contact the undersigned at 2892 6501.

Yours sincerely,

(Godwin LAI)

for Secretary for Education

c.c. Director of Social Welfare (Fax no.: 2838 0757)
Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Fax no.: 2147 5239)
Director of Audit (Fax no.: 2583 9063)

**Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 5 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 73
Special Education**

(I) For the Education Bureau

Part 2: Provision and management of school places and boarding places

- 1) According to paragraph 2.3 and 2.4 (b), the Education Bureau ("EDB") did not provide special school places for children with physical disability ("PD") and/or those with intellectual disability ("ID") at Outlying Islands, Sha Tin and Sai Kung regions. As at July 2019, EDB had no plan to provide school places for children with PD in the Outlying Islands region and for children with severe ID ("SID") in Sha Tin and Sai Kung region.
 - (a) Please tabulate numbers of students who live in one region but who have to attend a special school in another school region, and their respective school regions, breakdown by regions and types of schools.
 - (b) What is the intention to adopt a regional basis for providing school places? Does EDB consider the present distribution of school places not satisfactory? What are the principles to place children to schools at non-residing region? What measures has EDB taken to facilitate affected children to go to school?
 - (c) According to paragraphs 2.14(b) and 2.15, Secretary for Education ("SED") has agreed to consider expanding the scope of target students of special schools as far as practicable. What is the result of consideration? Is there a timetable for review? When will this review be completed? Does EDB plan that eventually all children with PD or with SID can be catered for in their own regions? What other measures will EDB take to address the issue?

(a), (b) and (c)

In the two decades from 1970, especially with the implementation of nine-year compulsory education in 1978, provision of special education services expanded rapidly with an increase in the number of special schools. Unlike the ordinary schools in the case of which there are well-specified standards for new schools to be set up to meet local school place demand, planning of special schools to meet specific local needs is not pragmatic since the number of children with more severe or multiple disabilities to be placed in different types of special schools is low and the location of their residential homes are scattered and random in nature. Therefore, special

schools are provided to meet territory-wide requirements while the location of new schools should be as widespread as possible to cater for children with various types of disabilities. When planning for new special schools and re-provisioning of existing special schools, due regard is given to the regional needs to reduce the imbalance of school provision among regions. In this regard, for planning purpose, schools for children with PD (PD schools) and schools for children with ID (ID schools, including schools for children with mild ID (MiID schools), schools for children with moderate ID (MoID schools) and schools for children with severe ID (SID schools) are reviewed and planned on a regional basis, namely Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and Tseung Kwan O, Sha Tin and Sai Kung, Tai Po and North, Kwai Tsing and Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long, and Outlying Islands. Having said so, availability and suitability of site for building special schools is one of our major restrictions. For example, for students having mobility problems, such as student with SID and PD, low-rise school building is preferred hence a large base area is required and smaller sites are not suitable. On top of that, all SID schools are provided with a boarding section. In sum, planning and establishing every type of special schools in every region was not the policy intention of the EDB owing to the comparatively small number of students requiring special school placement.

Hitherto there is no PD and ID schools in the Outlying Islands region. Nevertheless, the construction works of a new ID school in Tung Chung has been completed and the school premise has been handed over to the School Sponsoring Body (SSB) in November 2019. The EDB aims at operating the new school soonest possible and the SSB is actively preparing for the commencement of the new school within the 2019/20 school year. From the perspective of provision, the new school is provided with facilities required to cater for students with SID, which are similar to those for students with PD. If assessed to be suitable and with parental consent, students with PD residing in the Outlying Islands Region could also be admitted to the school. As for the students with SID living in the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region, currently they could be placed in SID schools located in the Kowloon and Tseung Kwan O region and/or the Tai Po and North region. Should they require boarding service, they could be placed in SID schools with a boarding section at other regions.

As a supplementary measure to the special school planning work so as to facilitate the placement of children with ID and PD in appropriate special schools, a referral and placement (R&P) mechanism has been established

by the EDB. The EDB has reviewed the R&P mechanism regularly to cope with any establishment and reprovisioning of special schools throughout the years. A major revision to the R&P mechanism for ID schools was made in 2012 in response to the strong request of parent associations for providing more school choice for parents.

According to the prevailing R&P mechanism, each ID school has its own catchment area, that is, the primary catchment area (PCA). Parents are recommended to choose an ID school the PCA of which covers their residential location so as to reduce the time spent to and from school. Apart from PCA, the EDB has divided Hong Kong into five extended catchment areas (ECAs) including (i) Hong Kong Island and outlying Islands (excluding Tung Chung); (ii) Kowloon, Tseung Kwan O and Sai Kung East; (iii) New Territories East and Sai Kung West; (iv) Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung, Tsing Yi and Tung Chung; and (v) Tuen Mun and Yuen Long. They are the regions of the R&P mechanism and are different from the seven regions for school planning purpose. Parents can apply for an ID school of the corresponding category for their children in the ECA to which their residential district belongs. The ID schools would provide school-bus service within the PCA and ECA as far as possible to help students to attend schools. This arrangement was made so as to address the parents' request for more school choice. Besides, parents may apply for an ID school of the relevant type for their children in the territory without restrictions of districts or regions, that is, a school in the territory catchment area (TCA). For the placement of children with PD, each of the seven PD schools has its own catchment area for admitting children living in its vicinity. Parents are recommended to choose a PD school nearer to their residence and they may discuss with the EDB if a school in another district (that is, a PD school with different catchment area) is preferred due to exceptional circumstances.

There are different reasons given by parents to request placing their children to a ID school outside PCA/ECA or to a PD school in another district, such as children being taken care of by a guardian living outside the PCA/ECA or in another district, children living in small group homes or parents requesting for admission to a specific school because of religious reason or to facilitate their children to receive services from rehabilitation centres near that school, etc. Furthermore, it is worth noting that not all the ID schools and PD schools operate a boarding section. Therefore, cross-area referrals are common and sometimes

inevitable for students requiring boarding service (boarders), especially 7-day boarders. Nevertheless, boarders do not need to travel between school and home during school days thus attending a school outside one's residential district would not be a hindrance to them.

In the past five school years from 2014/15 to 2018/19, unless specifically requested by parents for placing their children in an ID school outside PCA/ECA or a PD school with different catchment area, or requested for boarding placement for the children, the parents of children with ID could choose an ID school under PCA/ECA and the parents of children with PD could also choose a PD school the catchment area of which covers their residential location. Taking the situation of the 2018/19 school year as an example, the numbers of students enrolled in MiID schools, MoID schools, SID schools and PD schools are 3 218, 2 040, 706 and 907 respectively. The numbers of children who have been placed in an ID school outside PCA/ECA or a PD school with different catchment area due to various reasons as mentioned above, including cases due to the preference of the students' parents, are low and tabulated in the table below:

Regions of R&P Mechanism	MiID School	MoID School		SID School		PD School	
	Day Students	Boarders	Day students	Boarders	Day students	Boarders	Day students
Hong Kong Island and Outlying Islands (except Tung Chung)	2	100	3	0	0	17	1
Kowloon, Tseung Kwan O and Sai Kung East	13	1	8	25	4	10	3
New Territories East and Sai Kung West	16	0	1	21	0	8	1
Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung, Tsing Yi and Tung Chung	13	0	6	0	4	0	1
Tuen Mun and Yuen Long	0	22	3	13	0	1	0
Sub-total	44	123	21	59	8	36	6
Total	44	144		67		42	

Note: The statistics are compiled based on the residential address provided by the parents to the EDB at the application stage. The numbers may have been changed afterwards.

2) Low enrolment rates of certain special schools and schools for social development ("SSD") were found at Table 6 in paragraph 2.5 and Table 7 in paragraph 2.7. According to paragraph 2.15(c), EDB would discuss with SSD(s) with very low enrolment rate on the feasibility of their conversion to other types of special schools that have higher demand. A 2-year pilot scheme of special units has been carrying out in SSDs starting from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021 school year to provide intensive support for students with autism spectrum disorders in ordinary schools who display very severe adjustment problems. In this connection,

- (a) How did EDB collect and calculate these enrolment rates?
- (b) What are the reasons for the low enrolment rates of some SSDs?
- (c) Do the enrolment rates in Table 6 and Table 7 include students leaving that school year or students of other categories (i.e. short-term adjustment programmes at SSDs)? How would the enrolment rates change if the said students are not counted in calculating the enrolment rates?
- (d) What types of special schools does EDB consider to convert these SSD(s) to? Is EDB confident that the discussion with the SSD(s) would be fruitful? Has EDB commenced the discussion with the relevant SSD(s)? What is the progress?
- (e) What are the details of the 2-year pilot scheme? What is the number of target students? What progress has been made?

(a)

The enrolment rates were gathered from the special schools based on their enrolment situation on 15 September in each of the 3 respective school years i.e. 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19.

(b)

The admission of students to SSDs is gauged by a vetting committee founded under the Central Coordination Referral Mechanism (CCRM) for SSDs. Since its inception in 1994, the vetting committee makes reference to a set of criteria in a guideline developed between the EDB, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the SSDs to recommend suitable students to attend SSDs. The guideline comprises concrete illustrations to guide the vetting committee to determine the severity of emotional and behavioural difficulties displayed by students, thus informing their needs to attend a SSD. Referrers for SSDs can access the guideline from the webpage of the EDB and the link is appended below for easy reference.

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/special/support-subsidy/special-school/ccrm/ssd_3_Conceptual%20Framework%20and%20Illustrations_eng.pdf

Whilst the guideline has been updated in 2017 after a comprehensive review with key stakeholders, the basic criteria of admission to SSDs remain unchanged and a stable success rate of the applications to SSDs is observed in the last five years or so. The EDB also arranges periodic briefing sessions to share with personnel of ordinary schools and social services units the support programmes at SSDs, and encourage them to refer suitable students to the SSDs.

We understand that, with the provision of information and briefing, personnel of ordinary schools and social services units are well informed of the support programmes at SSDs available for their students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. At the same time, we observe that over the years, ordinary schools have gradually built up their capacity to cater for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties with the increase in additional resources, professional support and teacher training made available for the implementation of integrated education (IE), as well as an additional teaching post of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in the staff establishment. School-based educational psychology service and additional school social workers have also been provided for the public sector primary and secondary schools in recent years. The enhanced competency of ordinary schools and additional resources and manpower for them to manage students with diverse needs, including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties, might have led to less referrals made to the SSDs.

(c)

The enrolment rates in Table 6 and Table 7 were derived based on the number of students enrolled in SSDs (including students under the short-term adjustment programme) as at 15 September of the respective school years. The rates were a snapshot of the utilisation of SSDs. The total number of students with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural difficulties served by SSDs in a school year should be higher than the number of students in SSDs on the above cut-off dates because students upon completion of the time-limited support programme during the school year would be arranged reintegration to the ordinary schools as early as possible. The EDB will convene an ad hoc meeting with all principals of SSDs and superintendents of residential home (RHs) in February 2020 to discuss the recommendations related to SSDs made in Chapter 5 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 73 (DoA's recommendations). We will also discuss with SSDs the compiling of statistics on the total number of

students served by them in the respective school years so as to reflect the full picture of the utilisation rate of SSDs.

(d) and (e)

In order to make good use of the spare capacity of SSDs, as well as the expert skills of the school personnel of the SSDs, the 8 SSDs were invited in April 2019 to try operating a special unit in a pilot scheme from the 2019/20 to 2020/21 school years to cater for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) attending ordinary schools who display very challenging behaviours. Each special unit caters for 4 students with ASD with severe adjustment problems. Intensive psycho-social training will be rendered to these students in the special units with a view to improving their social communication, emotional regulation and prosocial behaviours to facilitate their reintegration into ordinary schools.

In the 2019/20 school year, 3 SSDs have rolled out the pilot scheme, with each SSD targeting at supporting a particular group of students with ASD, namely primary male students with ASD, secondary male students with ASD, and secondary female students with ASD respectively. The capacity of the 3 special units altogether is 12 students with ASD. The educational psychologists (EPs) of the EDB have been providing professional support to the operation of the 3 special units in 3 SSDs since August 2019. We will evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot scheme, including comparing the pre-and-post intervention outcomes of the students, and the views of stakeholders before considering expansion of this service mode.

At the same time, the EDB has lined up a meeting with the Hong Kong Special Schools Council (HKSSC) in January 2020 and another meeting with all principals of SSDs and superintendents of RHs in February 2020 to discuss the DoA's recommendations, among which the reasons and appropriate measures to address the low enrolment rates of SSDs will be brought up. We will explore with the SSDs also the feasibility of them converting to ID schools the demands for which are projected to be on a rising trend in the coming years. The overall planning of SSDs will be formulated after we have assessed the effectiveness of the pilot scheme for students with ASD and outcomes of the exploration with the SSDs concerned on changing their clientele and service modes.

- 3) EDB has been working to increase the boarding places for students with moderate intellectual disability through conversion programme and

construction of new boarding sections and new schools as detailed in paragraph 2.24.

- (a) What are the details of a new school for children with ID in Tung Chung which is expected to commence operation in 2020-2021 school year, such as the costs and number of places provided? What is the progress? Can the number of places to be provided meet the demand in the region?
- (b) How will the distribution of cross-region intake be after all new schools and its boarding section commence operation in 2025-2026?

(a) and (b)

The new special school in Tung Chung will be provided with 18 classrooms and related facilities for students with MiID, MoID and SID. It also has a boarding section for students with MoID and SID with boarding needs. The construction was at an estimated cost of \$334.7 million in money-of-the-day prices in 2017. The project was completed and handed over to the SSB in November 2019. The school aims at providing education and boarding services for children with ID with priority to those residing in the Islands District. The school could provide 198 school places and 60 boarding places. Apart from meeting the demand for school places and boarding places from children with ID residing in the Islands District, the new special school will also help meet the overall demand for boarding places from children with MoID from other districts.

Review of catchment areas of special schools is conducted annually and, subject to the consent of special schools concerned, adjustment will be made to better meet the regional demand. For example, in the school year before the two new ID schools (one with a boarding section) under planning in Kowloon Tong commence operation, the EDB will review comprehensively the PAC and EAC of the ID schools so as to achieve a more balanced supply and demand for ID school places across regions. If the building projects go smoothly, we expect that the two new ID schools and the boarding section could commence operation by the 2025/26 school year. By then, parents would have more school choice and subject to their option, their children would be referred to special schools nearer to their residence.

- 4) With reference to paragraph 2.12, the discharge arrangements of SSDs are implemented for students under short-term adjustment programme and those not under the programme. Based on paragraph 2.13, there were on average 41% and 46% of SSD students under short and long-term adjustment programmes respectively stayed in schools beyond expected timeframe.

- (a) In terms of enrollment procedures and case processing for students in short-term adjustment programme in SSDs, what are the differences in workload and treatment between students who are enrolled in the programme and for those not under the programme?
- (b) Based on what criteria/reasons students under short-term adjustment programme were expected to leave school within three months to one year?
- (c) What are the reasons for students who are not studying short-term adjustment programme in the SSDs to stay over two years? What is the number of cases for each cause in the past five years?
- (d) Based on what criteria/reasons students who are not under short-term adjustment programme are expected to leave within two school years? Why does EDB believe that students would have a significant improvement within two school years? With the start of the new secondary school curriculum, is the two-academic-year programme still a suitable period? Has EDB conducted any study on this? If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons?
- (e) As stated in paragraph 2.15 (e), EDB notes that there are a number of reasons whereby students require long time studying in SSDs. This proves that staying at school for two years may be an unrealistic assumption. Is there any review on the two-year stay? If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons?
- (f) Does EDB agree that the unexpectedly long period of stay not conducive to fully realizing the aim to provide more intensive guidance to students such that they may reintegrate into ordinary schools as soon as possible? What specific measures have been and will be taken to improve the situation?

(a)

The vetting committee of the CCRM will in general recommend students with moderate emotional and behavioural difficulties to attend the short-term adjustment programme in SSDs. Those students will maintain their registration in their original schools. For students with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties, they are recommended to leave their original schools and enrol in the SSDs. The nature of services for the two types of students in SSDs is basically the same. Counselling and prosocial behaviours training are provided for them on top of their learning of a formal curriculum in class. The major difference of the two types of students is the scheduled timeframe to review their progress and readiness to resume education in ordinary schools. Since the students attending short-term adjustment programme in SSDs are still registered in their original schools, the ordinary schools are expected to keep regular liaison with the SSDs in which their students are enrolled and prepare to reintegrate their students upon their discharge from the SSDs.

(b)

Premised on the principle of IE that it is most desirable for students to learn in the least restrictive environment and not in a segregated setting, the SSDs are established with a view to providing intensive support to the needy students, helping them to overcome their emotional and behavioural difficulties so that they can reintegrate into ordinary schools as early as possible. Research evidence on the efficacy of various intervention programmes for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties suggests that there are three-to-six month programmes that can produce marked and long-lasting positive results. Making reference to these findings and based on the principle of IE, we have set the discharge target for the students in the short-term adjustment programme to be within three to twelve months, thus providing an indicator for the SSDs to work towards. The EDB will collate and present statistical figures on the length of stay of students under the short-term adjustment programme to facilitate the discussion in the meeting with all principals of SSDs and superintendents of RHs in February 2020 to determine the need to adjust the expected duration of the short-term adjustment programme.

(c)

The EDB notes that there are a number of reasons why students requiring prolong study in SSDs, such as the need for completion of senior secondary education, poor family support and awaiting alternative placement, etc. The number of cases not under short-term adjustment programme and with prolong stay in SSDs due to different reasons in the past five years is as follows:

School Year	Need for completion of senior secondary education	Poor family support	Awaiting for alternative study arrangement	Emotional and behavioural problem	Others/ Information not available	Total
2014/15	63	25	15	6	16	125
2015/16	51	30	6	8	16	111
2016/17	62	17	22	13	15	129
2017/18	40	15	14	7	14	90
2018/19	39	15	15	7	19	95

(d) to (f)

Similar to the rationale mentioned in (b) above, we aspire to timely reintegrate the students into ordinary schools so that they can reap the benefits of mainstream schooling. The target for the students of SSDs to stay in school for not more than two years was set years ago after considering research findings that there were programmes lasting for less than two years for students with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties with proven results. According to the experience of SSDs/RHs and statistics collected in the past, most students in SSDs were able to achieve improvement and leave school within two school years. As such, the EDB, SWD and SSDs/RHs have agreed to take two school years as a reference point for follow-up on the long stay cases in SSDs.

Even though we have set a target for SSDs to achieve, we do consider the support and circumstantial needs of individual students. We flexibly allow individual students to stay beyond two years when SSDs report them to have continuous support needs after the review at school. And considering that with the introduction of the New Senior Secondary Curriculum, some students may find it too disruptive to have to adapt to a new school when they have already completed a substantial part of the three-year senior secondary study in one school.

For other prolonged stay cases with other reported reasons, we will review if it is still pragmatic with the change of times to continue expect most students in SSDs to be discharged within two years. This issue will also be brought up for discussion in the meeting with all principals of SSDs and superintendents of RHs in February 2020.

As mentioned above, we expect the students of SSDs to reintegrate into ordinary schools as soon as possible whilst flexibly is allowed for individual students who have support and circumstantial needs to stay beyond the expected duration in SSDs. We will review the viability of the targets for students of SSDs as well as those under the short-term adjustment programme with a view to striking a balance between the principle of early reintegration and the genuine needs of the students.

- 5) The recent social incidents have caused many students to have emotional/behavioural problems. Does EDB have any plans/preparations, such as reserving resources and school places provided by SSDs to support the learning and accommodation needs of these affected students?

Based on our exchanges with the school personnel, school-based EPs and psychiatrists, the top demand for support of the students who are affected by the recent social unrests is mental health support in consideration of signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety problems they exhibit. They need counselling services provided by the school social workers, psychological services rendered by the school-based EPs, and where necessary, referral to the psychiatrists for psychiatric treatment. It is doubtful if it is in the interest of these students to change their schools when the students are in the said psychological conditions and are undergoing medical treatment. That said, SSDs are set up to provide education for students with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural difficulties. If there are students whose support needs are commensurate with the targets of SSDs and assessed to be able to be benefited from schooling in SSDs, ordinary schools can make use of the existing mechanism to refer them to the SSDs. It is envisaged that based on the existing enrolment situation of the schools, SSDs have capacity to cater for the increase in demand for their services.

- 6) As mentioned in paragraph 2.15(d), EDB will consider providing more options of special schools for the school-age students with ID and students with PD subject to their genuine needs. Has EDB completed the review? If yes, what are the review results? If no, when will the review be completed?

Currently, parents of school-age students with ID and PD may discuss with the officers of the EDB during the R&P interviews should they want to choose an ID school outside the PCA/ECA or a PD school with different catchment area due to their special circumstances. In view of the DoA's recommendation, the EDB will discuss with the HKSSC and the special schools concerned in the 2019/20 school year about allowing every school-age student with ID and PD to choose a special school in the territory. Parent associations will also be consulted. Subject to their comments, the EDB will decide whether the proposed arrangement could be adopted, and if it could be, the schedule for implementation.

- 7) According to paragraph 2.19, as at 15 September 2018, notwithstanding that there were 26 students with SID waiting for seven-day boarding service, there were 40 vacant places for five-day boarding service. According to paragraph 2.35(a), EDB will introduce more support to schools to encourage their converting five-day boarding places to seven-day boarding places. EDB will also discuss with special schools the feasibility of offering vacant

five-day boarding places as a temporary arrangement for students with SID who are waiting for seven-day boarding service.

- (a) please set out in a table the differences between the five-day boarding service and the seven-day boarding service for students with SID, in terms of the staffing arrangements, services provided, other resources required, and other aspects?
- (b) What criteria does EDB use to determine whether a student needs five or seven days boarding service?
- (c) What are the biggest difficulties encountered by special schools for students with SID which are operating a seven-day boarding service? If there is a manpower shortage, please list the types and number. How could the Administration's response to the recommendations in the Audit Report address these difficulties? Please provide the recommendations and the respective action taken by the Administration in a table.
- (d) Does EDB consider the imbalance of demand and supply seven-day boarding service not satisfactory? What measures has EDB taken to address the issue? What progress had been made?
- (e) What support has EDB introduced to the special schools for conversion of five-day boarding places to seven-day boarding places? Has EDB discussed with the special schools concerned for offering vacant five-day boarding places as a temporary arrangement for students with SID who are waiting for seven-day boarding service? If yes, what are the results? If no, when will EDB discuss with them?
- (f) Has EDB studied about changing the special schools that provide five-day boarding services to seven-day boarding services, so that the admissions of schools can be more flexible while suiting the needs of students who are currently waiting for places? If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons?

(a) and (c) to (f)

In view of the increasing demand for 7-day boarding places, the EDB has been communicating with the special schools with a boarding section, in particular those offer solely 5-day boarding service, to identify ways to increase the provision whenever feasible. For instance, we had a formal meeting with the principals of SID schools in January 2019 to discuss, inter alia, the issue of increasing the provision of 7-day boarding service. Principals of SID schools offering solely 5-day boarding service were encouraged to actively explore the feasibility of providing 7-day boarding service in their boarding sections. However, they were reluctant to extend their boarding service owing to various school-based consideration. Among others, readiness of the serving staff to change their mode and

routine of work, the manpower provided by EDB for 7-day boarding service and the anticipated difficulties in recruiting supporting staff were their major concerns.

With a view to addressing the stakeholders' rising expectation for boarding service, meeting the increasing number of boarders in need of 7-day boarding service and catering for the intensive care needs of some boarders, the Chief Executive has announced in the 2019 Policy Address that the EDB would further enhance the staff establishment of the boarding sections in aided special schools starting from the 2020/21 school year. Relevant enhancement measures are as follows:

- (i) Upgrading the ranks of warden and assistant warden of boarding sections with a capacity of 40 or above, and increasing the number of assistant wardens and houseparents-in-charge accordingly to strengthen the collaboration between the management teams of boarding sections and school sections in special schools with a view to providing more appropriate life skills training and counselling for boarders;
- (ii) Further improving the weekend and Sunday manning ratios for boarding sections so that special schools offering 7-day boarding service will have extra manpower to take care of their boarders; and
- (iii) Providing an additional grant for the boarding sections of schools for children with PD, MoID, SID and VI cum ID to employ personal care workers or hire related services.

The staffing arrangements and grants provided for the boarding sections of SID schools offering 5-day boarding services and 7-day boarding services upon the implementation of the above new initiatives in the 2020/21 school year are tabulated in the two tables below for reference:

Staffing arrangement for the boarding section of SID schools

Type of Staff	Current Provision		New Provision
	5-day boarding service	7-day boarding service	7-day boarding service
Warden	1		1

Type of Staff	Current Provision		New Provision
	5-day boarding service	7-day boarding service	7-day boarding service
Assistant Warden	1		(i) 1 (for a boarding section with a capacity of 39 boarders or less) (ii) 2 (for a boarding section with a capacity of 40 boarders or above)
Houseparent-in-charge	1 for every 4 posts of houseparent (for a boarding section with a capacity of 50 boarders and above)		1 for every 4 posts of houseparent (for a boarding section with a capacity of 40 boarders and above)
Houseparent	2 for 8 boarders	1.4 for 8 boarders *	2 for 8 boarders*
Programme Worker			
(i) 60 boarders or less	(i) 1	(i) 0.7*	(i) 1*
(ii) 61-120 boarders	(ii) 2	(ii) 1.4*	(ii) 2*
Nurse	1 for 25 boarders	0.7 for 25 boarders*	1 for 25 boarders*
Clerical Assistant	1		1
Cook			
(i) 39 boarders or less	(i) 2	(i) 1.4*	(i) 2*
(ii) 40-79 boarders	(ii) 3	(ii) 2.1*	(ii)3*
(iii) 80 boarders or more	(iii) 4	(iii) 2.8*	(iii)4*
Watchmen	2		4
Janitor Staff	1 for 10 or fewer boarders	0.7 for 10 or fewer boarders*	1 for 10 or fewer boarders*

** The total manpower for 7-day boarding service includes the number of staff for 5-day boarding service plus that for the 7-day boarding service.*

Grants provided for the boarding section of SID schools#

Type of Grant	5-day boarding service	7-day boarding service
Boarding Grant (per boarder)	\$1,632	\$1,632
Top-up Boarding Grant (per boarder)	NA	\$654
Air-conditioning Grant		
(i) per approved boarding place	(i) \$1,454	(i) \$2,793
(ii) per TV/common room	(ii) \$12,294	(ii) \$46,262
(iii) per dining/multi-purpose room	(iii) \$12,294	(iii) \$46,262
Additional Support Grant* for Enhancing the Support for Boarders with Medical Complexity (MC) in Aided Special Schools		
(i) Tier 1 support	(i) \$17,069	(i) \$34,138
(ii) Tier 2 support	(ii) \$28,449	(ii) \$56,898
* a minimum provision of \$182,076 per school per annum for special schools having admitted boarders with MC		
Personal Care Workers Grant (one unit of additional grant for two nurses in the establishment)	around \$225,000 per unit	

Grant rates for the 2019/20 school year for reference only.

The EDB has conducted a briefing on the new initiatives for all special schools operating a boarding section in December 2019. Further discussion with those special schools currently offering solely 5-day boarding services will be conducted in the first quarter of the 2020 so as to explore the feasibility of their operation of 7-day boarding service under the enhanced provisions.

(b)

When receiving applications for boarding placement in special schools, we would assess whether the applicants meet the criteria for boarding service (please refer to paragraph 2.16(b) of the Audit Report) based on the professional reports and supporting documents available. The parents/guardians would be advised to apply 5-day boarding placement for the children concerned as far as possible since we consider that family lives are important to children. Should it be confirmed that the carers are unable to take care of the students concerned during weekdays, weekends, Sundays and school holidays, such as the carers are required to work on shift duty,

suffering from serious chronic illnesses or living in remote areas, etc., 7-day boarding service would be granted. Applications for 5-day boarding service would be approved if the carers could take care of their children during weekends, Sundays and school holidays.

- 8) Has Social Welfare Department made an analysis on the reasons for refusing applications by current students at schools for social development for seven-day boarding and considered providing an appeal mechanism for these cases?

As advised by PAC, the EDB is not required to handle this question.

- 9) According to paragraph 2.25, there would be a shortfall of boarding places throughout the projection period of seven school years. What are the details of EDB's action plan to address this issue?

Boarding sections are usually co-located with the school sections of special schools with the aim of facilitating students' access to education. The main objective is to cater for the long-term need of students with more severe and multiple disabilities and to facilitate them to receive education during school days. Subject to the projected demand for additional boarding places, the EDB would seek to include a new boarding section in new school building projects and/or to expand existing boarding sections by means of re-provisioning projects and/or conversion works as necessary.

In view of the sustained high demand for boarding service by students with MoID, there are several planned work projects to increase the supply. A new ID school with 60 boarding places for students with MoID and SID in Tung Chung has been completed in November 2019. Four other projects are expected to complete in the next few years. Details are tabulated below for reference:

Region	No. of new boarding places	Expected year of commencement (school year)
A MoID school in Shatin & Sai King	12	2020/21
A MoID school in Tai Po & North	60	2021/22
A MiMoID school in Tai Po & North	60	2021/22
A new MiMoID school in Kowloon & Tsuen Kwan O	80	2025/26

In the interim, the EDB will continue to explore other feasible ways, such as making use of the space available in existing boarding sections of ID schools, to increase the supply with reference to the actual demand for the boarding places. For example, the EDB has invited an SID school to operate 2 additional classes and 20 boarding places for children with MoID on a pilot-basis since the 2017/18 school year.

- 10) With reference to 2.35(c), EDB will discuss with special schools the procedures for conducting school-based review of students' boarding needs. Guidelines will be issued accordingly. What are the current school-based guidelines for conducting these reviews? Was EDB aware of the difficulties faced by schools in verifying the boarding needs? If yes, what measures have been taken to assist in the examination of boarders? When does EDB expect that new guidelines will be issued?

Special schools with a boarding section are required by the EDB to review the boarding needs of their boarders regularly to ensure that boarding services are provided for those students with genuine needs. All the principals of the special schools are well informed of the request and they would conduct regular review of the boarding needs and status of their boarders using their school-based guidelines as the basis for assessment. The requirement is also stated in the EDB's referral letters for day and boarding placement to remind the schools that boarding service should be provided to those students with genuine needs. Under all circumstances, when there are any boarding places available, schools are required to report to the EDB to ensure effective use of the boarding places, including those boarding places which are made available after their regular review of the boarding needs of their boarders. Under the prevailing practice, special schools are required to report the number of available boarding places to EDB at five intervals of a school year (namely, September 15, November 15, January 15, April 15 and June 15 of a school year) to facilitate our monitoring of their use of the boarding places.

We understand the limitations and difficulties encountered by the special schools in verifying the family problem and situation of their boarders, which will change from time to time. Good practices currently adopted by individual special schools operating a boarding section as well as advice by the EDB would be shared and discussed in the annual meetings with the principals of different types of special schools every school year. In response to the DoA's recommendation, we will consult the HKSSC and special schools about formulating a practical guide for the schools' review of the boarding needs of their boarders in a consistent manner. Subject to their responses, it is expected that the guide could be issued for use in the 2020/21 school year.

Part 3: Staffing of special schools

- 11) According to paragraphs 3.3, 3.9 and 3.12, there was high wastage of teachers in special schools and unfilled posts of occupational therapists and physiotherapist posts, and other non-professional staff.
- (a) What is the latest wastage rate of teachers in special schools? What measures has EDB taken to alleviate the overall shortage problem? Has the vacancy situation been improved by the measures?
 - (b) Has EDB collected data and analysed the causes and distribution of the teachers' turnover in various special schools? If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons?
 - (c) Will EDB conduct analysis on wastage rate for specialist and non-specialist staff in the future so as to better monitor the wastage rates?
 - (d) What measures did EDB take to assist special schools in employing occupational therapist and physiotherapist?
 - (e) According to paragraph 3.15(a), EDB will pass to the Food and Health Bureau the manpower demand for occupational therapist and physiotherapist in school sector for manpower planning. Has this been done? How many specialist staff will be needed to fill the gap? When does EDB expect that demand from schools can be satisfied? What other measures will be taken to improve the situation?
 - (f) According to paragraph 3.15(b), EDB will monitor the vacancy situation of non-specialist staff and consider providing more flexibility to special schools in freezing some of those unfilled posts in return for cash grants as appropriate. What is the result of consideration?
 - (g) What is the cost-effectiveness of the cash grants for hiring temporary staff or purchasing related services against the quality of services received by students? What criteria does EDB use to assess the impact? If negative impacts are found, is there any mechanism for review and improvement?
 - (h) How many teachers, specialist staff and non-specialist staff who have terminated employment have received special education training? Please provide details; if there are no relevant statistics, why?
 - (i) What are the reasons for not filling the vacant teacher, specialist and non-specialist positions? How did the shortage of personnel affect the operation of a school? Please elaborate by types of special schools.
 - (j) Has EDB assessed any factors in the future which may aggravate further the manpower shortage problem, such as the establishment of new special schools and the implementation of other programs leading to a large number of manpower requirements by other schools/institutions? In these cases, will it be more difficult for EDB to implement the recommendations made by Audit? What solutions does EDB have to address the problems?

(a) and (b)

The EDB has all along been providing support to help special school teachers build their capacity and enhance their professional competence. Moreover, we have been implementing various measures to increase the job satisfaction and sense of belongings of special school teachers so as to maintain a stable teaching force in the schools and attract new teachers to join the special school sector. For example, we have collaborated with tertiary institutions to deliver professional development programmes for special school teachers, and organised professional sharing activities, workshops and seminars, etc. to enhance professional sharing among special school teachers. In addition, the EDB has continued to deploy resources in special education and implemented relevant enhancement measures to improve the quality of education. In recent years, the EDB has progressively reduced the class size of various types of special schools so as to allow teachers more capacity to engage in school-based curriculum development, lesson preparation and other professional activities. The ratio of graduate teacher posts in the special schools has been increased to 100% so as to enhance the quality of teaching and attract more talents. Additional manpower and resources have also been provided for special schools to support the teachers and to enhance their career development. The EDB will keep in view the wastage rate of special school teachers and introduce relevant measures as appropriate.

The wastage rate in the past few years are set out in the table below:

School Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Number of Teachers Left	111	115	120	115	157
Wastage Rate	6.8%	6.9%	7.1%	6.8%	8.5%

According to the information submitted by the special schools, among the teachers who left the special school sector in the 2018/19 school year, over one-third were transferred to other schools, about one-third were due to personal reasons such as retirement, emigration or family matters, and the remaining one-third did not give a clear indication of their way forward or reason for leaving. There was a larger than usual number leaving special schools to join ordinary schools because starting from the 2017/18 school year and by phases in three school years, each public sector ordinary school would be provided with an additional Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) post for steering and coordinating services and support for students with SEN. The schools prefer to deploy teachers with training and experience in special education to take up the post. Hence, some schools might have employed special school teachers as SENCO,

giving rise to the larger turnover rate of special school teachers. It seems that the increase of wastage number in the 2018/19 school year is not a major cause for concern. The creation of SENCO posts would be completed by the 2019/20 school year thus there would not be a competition for teachers with special education training after this year. The EDB will, nonetheless, continue to monitor the wastage rate closely and collect the views and sentiments of special school teachers towards their work and introduce/continue effective measures to improve their working environment and support their professional development.

(c) to (g), and (i)

The Government published the report of the Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development (“Report”) in June 2017. Based on the Report, there is a general shortage of healthcare professions, including occupational therapists (“OTs”), physiotherapists (“PTs”). Over the past ten years, the Government has substantially increased the number of University Grants Committee (“UGC”)-funded physiotherapy and occupational therapy training places by 130% (from 100 in 2008/09 in total to 230 in 2018/19). In the 2019-20 to 2021-22 UGC triennium, the number of physiotherapy and occupational therapy publicly-funded first-degree intake places is further increased to 150 and 100 respectively. The Government will also count on the self-financing sector to provide training to help meet part of the increasing demand for healthcare professionals. The Government has subsidised 100 students studying in qualified self-financing physiotherapy and occupational therapy training programmes under the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors (“SSSDP”) in the 2019-20 cohort. Food and Health Bureau (FHB) will continue to assess the manpower requirements for healthcare professional once every three years in line with the triennial planning cycle of UGC.

Currently, to alleviate the recruitment difficulties of OTs and PTs, special schools may freeze some of the OT and PT vacancies in exchange for cash grants to recruit temporary staff who prefer flexible mode of work or hire related services from NGOs or private companies. To assure the quality of services received by students, circulars are issued to advise the schools to observe the relevant qualifications and requirements as stipulated in the Code of Aid for Special Schools/Code of Aid for Aided Schools for hiring temporary staff or purchase related services. Moreover, the EDB has conducted a review in mid-2018 on the encashment arrangements for the specialist staff as well as the cap for freezing the vacant posts for encashment by collecting the information on the strengths and encashment

situation of the specialist staff. The review result supported the arrangements in general could meet the operational needs of the schools. We will keep on monitoring the actual supply and demand situation along with other relevant factors, and will conduct another review on the above encashment arrangements as and when appropriate.

In formulating new policies, the EDB has all along taken into account views from the sector through our regular meetings with HKSSC and the Task Force on Provision of Education in Special Schools. For non-specialist staff, the difficulties of schools in recruitment are due to the comparatively demanding work nature in special schools which has deterred the candidates to join the sector and are likely to continue. Considering the views and suggestion of the sector, we will provide an additional cash grant for special schools in need to employ personal care workers and/or hire related services to relief the workload of their supporting staff. The cash grant could provide the schools with flexibility in employing extra hands in order to retain their supporting staff currently working in the schools. On top of that, the manning ratio of the boarding section operating 7-day services will also be enhanced. We will continue to incorporate views and suggestions of the sector in exploring feasible solutions to enable special schools to address their non-specialist manpower needs.

(h)

We have not collected statistics on the training background of special school teachers who have left the sector. According to our impression, there is no causal relationship between professional training of special school teachers and the turnover rate of teachers in special schools. Teachers who left the sector comprise those who have received special education training and those who have not received/begun the training. For specialist staff and non-specialist staff in special schools, there is no special education training requirements. Therefore, we do not maintain statistics on the termination of employment of special school teachers, specialist staff and non-specialist staff with/without special education training.

(j)

The EDB monitors the supply and demand for teachers and advises the UGC-funded universities of the manpower requirements in teachers for the planning of teacher training programmes through the triennium planning exercise. We do not envisage that there will be manpower shortage of teachers in special schools. There will be new special schools coming into operation in future years but it should be noted that the increase in number of special schools would provide more choices for parents of students but would not affect the number of students requiring special education hence would largely not affect the specialist manpower required. For specialist

manpower required for special schools, in assessing the manpower required for input to FHB for UGC's triennium planning exercise, the EDB takes into account a host of factors including the special school student population estimate. Moreover, as mentioned above, the EDB will continue to encourage the self-financing post-secondary education sector to offer programmes in selected disciplines (including OT and PT) to nurture talent in support of specific industries with keen demand for human resources. We will also maintain our contact with the FHB with a view to improving the manpower supply for various specialist staff in special schools. For non-specialist staff such as clerical staff, drivers, watchmen and janitor staff, increase in the number of special schools would require an increase in their establishment. The EDB will continue to explore with the sector measures and flexibilities that can be put into place to attract the needed manpower for these posts.

- 12) According to paragraph 3.17, in view of the different educational needs of students enrolled in special schools, Training Course for Special School Teachers ("TCSST") specifically offered to special school teachers has been launched since 2012-2013.
- (a) Are the professional requirements of teachers in special schools in Hong Kong in line with the requirements in other developed regions/countries? What are the details of the requirements? Please compare in a list, with Taiwan and the United Kingdom as examples, among others.
 - (b) The 240-hour TCSST provided by EDB for special school teachers is theory based. Is this course similar to those international training courses for special education teachers in terms of contents and training hours? Please provide details.
 - (c) Has EDB studied the relationship between lack of professional training of teachers (Figure 6) and turnover rate in special schools? If yes, what are the findings? If no, why not?
 - (d) Please list the distribution of the number of in-service special school teachers participated in TCSST and those who do not have special education training qualifications in different types of special schools. What are the difficulties in scheduling teachers to enroll in TCSST?
 - (e) The employment of teachers in special schools without qualifications in special education training may result in inconsistent quality of care for students with special needs. Has EDB conducted a quality assessment in this regard? If yes, what are the details? If no, why not?
 - (f) Has the EDB put forward short-term and long-term improvement measures to increase percentage of teachers in special schools with special education and training qualifications background? If yes, what are the details? If no, why not?

- (g) Has EDB proposed any measures to increase the training rate for special schools with teachers' training qualification percentage of less than 70%? If yes, what are the details? If no, why not?
- (h) According to paragraph 3.19(a), EDB had not promulgated the recognition criteria of structured training courses, and that individual schools did not know the percentages of their teachers who had completed specified education training. Does EDB consider the lack of transparency not satisfactory? When does EDB expect that the information concerned will be provided to schools for their reference?

(a) and (b)

Since the 2007/08 school year, the EDB has been providing serving teachers of ordinary schools and special schools with structured training courses pitched at basic, advanced and thematic levels (BAT Courses) to enhance their professional capacity in catering for students with SEN. With reference to the international practice including that of the United Kingdom, the thematic courses have been organised under three categories, namely (i) behavioural, emotional and social development needs, (ii) cognition and learning needs, and (iii) sensory, communication and physical needs since the 2012/13 school year to provide a more systematic structure of special education training for teachers. In view of the educational needs of students with more severe or multiple disabilities in special schools and with reference to the design of the BAT Courses, a 240-hour Training Course for Special School Teachers (TCSST) has been launched starting from the 2012/13 school year. Tailor-made for various categories of special schools, the course comprises four modules: (i) theories, principles and practices in special education, (ii) academic and learning support, (iii) behavioural, emotional, and social development support, and (iv) sensory, communication and physical support, together with a 6-month practicum specifically designed to allow participants to bring theory to practice in a local context. The participants' feedback has been good and positive.

Regarding the professional requirements for special school teachers, different countries or regions have different education systems, contexts, culture and problems. While some countries impose mandatory qualifications for special school teachers, experience suggests that our current practice, in which the EDB provides teachers with on-the-job training, not only encourages more teachers to serve in special schools, but also allows both schools and teachers to enjoy the flexibility of taking the structured training courses specifically to meet their professional and practical needs. Teachers will be granted paid study leave and the EDB

will offer subsidy for schools to employ supply teachers so as to facilitate schools to arrange teachers to attend the professional development courses. We will continue to monitor the teacher training situation in schools so as to equip as many teachers as possible to have training in special education.

(c)

As mentioned in our reply to Q11(a) above, we have not collected statistics on the training background of special school teachers who have left the sector. According to our impression, there is no causal relationship between professional training of special school teachers and the turnover rate of teachers in special schools.

(d)

Apart from TCSST, in-service special school teachers could participate in the BAT Courses and other relevant special education training. When they have met the requirements set by the EDB, they will be counted as teachers with special education training. Please see below the number of teachers with special education training in different types of special schools in the 2018/19 school year.

Type of School	Number of Schools	Total Number of Teachers	Number of Teachers (%)	
			With SE Training	Without SE Training
MiID School	12	440	316 (72%)	124 (28%)
MiID & MoID School*	5	288	225 (78%)	63 (22%)
MoID School	14	375	294 (78%)	81 (22%)
SID School	10	201	145 (72%)	56 (28%)
PD School	7	230	147 (64%)	83 (36%)
VI School	2	58	41 (71%)	17 (29%)
HI School	1	38	27 (71%)	11 (29%)
SSD	8	174	98 (56%)	76 (44%)
Hospital School	1	68	49 (72%)	19 (28%)

**There are 5 ID schools operate both MiID Section and MoID Section. Since it is common that the teachers will perform their teaching duties in both sections of their schools, we therefore separate the teacher training situation of these 5 schools from that of the MiID schools and MoID schools.*

Based on our understanding from the discussions with special schools, some special schools may have difficulty in releasing teachers to attending the full-time training courses since the teachers have been fully engaged in teaching or other duties. For the SSDs, PD schools and SID schools, they have difficulty in releasing their teachers since the schools find it difficult to employ suitable candidates as supply teachers to support their students with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties/severe and multiple disabilities.

(e), (f) and (g)

All teachers of special schools, whether having obtained special education qualification or not, have been provided with different opportunities for their professional development so as to enhance their professional capacity in taking care of the students with SEN. For pre-service teachers, local teacher education universities (TEUs) have already included a module related to special education or catering for students with SEN in their pre-service teacher training courses. For serving teachers, apart from structured training like BAT and TCSST, the EDB organises different theme-based training activities including seminars, workshops, learning circles and sharing sessions to share good practices and update teachers on the current trend and approach in catering for students with SEN. In addition, to further enhance professional leadership of special school teachers, the EDB will commission a TEU to offer the Leadership Development Programme for Middle Leaders of Special Schools (i.e., vice principals or senior teachers of special schools) to enhance their leadership capacity for effective management.

With the introduction of school-based management, the Government devolves more responsibilities to schools and provides them with greater autonomy and flexibility in their daily operations, resources management and planning for school development. Through school-based management, schools develop their own characteristics, establish their own culture and identity, seek self-improvement and pursues excellence. Hence, special schools would organise their professional development activities for teachers based on their specific needs. Also, special schools could arrange teachers to participate in various support projects/schemes, seminars, workshops, experience sharing sessions, etc. organised by the EDB based on their school-based developmental needs. All the above would help our teachers in special schools to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in catering for students with SEN.

Upon several rounds of discussion between the EDB and HKSSC and after consulting special schools and their teachers, starting from the 2018/19 school year, each special school is required to achieve up to 85% to 100% of

teachers with special education training by the end of the 2022/23 school year. The EDB will closely monitor the progress of training target achieved by individual special schools and increase the number of training places of TCSST in the following school years if necessary. At the same time, the EDB will encourage special schools to arrange teachers to attend the training courses in a systematic manner, including issuing reminders to schools which has lagged behind the training target, so that the special schools can attain the training target on or before the 2022/23 school year.

(h)

The EDB has reviewed the special education training qualifications of special school teachers according to a set of course recognition criteria internally. After a series of consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including schools, teachers and representatives of TEUs, the EDB will promulgate the recognised special education training courses to facilitate special schools to take measures to achieve the teacher training target by the 2022/23 school year.

Part 4: Grants and support for special education

13) According to paragraph 4.3 and 4.4, special schools did not actively participate in sharing sessions and learning circles.

- (a) Does EDB understand the reasons for the low participation rates?
- (b) Has EDB completed the review of learning circles as mentioned in paragraph 4.5? What measures have been and will be taken to encourage schools' participation?
- (c) Has EDB made investigations and analysis on the needs of sharing sessions and learning circles from the perspective of teachers in special schools? If yes, what are the details? If no, why not?

(a), (b) and (c)

All along, different sections and divisions of EDB organise various professional development activities for special schools every school year. Special schools arrange relevant teachers and staff to participate in the support programmes, seminars, workshops, experience sharing sessions, etc. based on their school-based developmental needs. In recent years, in addition to the development of learning and teaching strategies, they have to inject effort in STEM education, career and life planning education, teacher professional development, etc. In determining the participation of any professional development activities, special schools will consider a number of school-based factors, such as the schools' development needs at different stages, and the priority of their individual major areas of concern. The themes of the sharing sessions and learning circles under Cross-Sector

Communication (CSC) of Tripartite Model of Support (TMS) were designed to meet the needs of those special schools which required further development on learning and teaching strategies. It may not be the priority needs of all special schools at that time and so some special schools may not participate in the activities. It should be clarified that it was not the intention of the EDB that all special schools should join the sharing sessions and learning circles under CSC of TMS. The EDB will continue to collect views from the special schools on their preferred themes of the sharing sessions and learning circles under CSC of TMS so as to address the special schools' needs on professional development.

14) According to paragraph 4.11, not all suspected day students with medical complexity reported by special schools had been assessed due to acute shortage of manpower.

(a) Does EDB consider such way of handling applications not satisfactory? Does EDB agree with Audit that the actual number of day students with medical complexity may be much higher if all suspected cases were assessed?

(b) What difficulties do special schools encounter in taking care of students with medical complexity? Please list them in details.

(c) Are these difficulties some of the major concerns for schools in operating seven-day boarding services and hiring staff?

(d) How does EDB ensure that employees of special schools that provide five- or seven-day boarding services are capable of providing professional and consistent levels of service to students with medical complexity? If there is no relevant training or monitoring mechanism, what are the reasons?

(a) to (d)

To facilitate special schools in enhancing their support for students with medical complexity (MC), an additional grant (hereafter named as the MC Grant) was introduced in the 2014/15 school year. A student would be defined as with MC if the result of his/her medical assessment meets the criteria formulated jointly by the EDB and the Hospital Authority (HA). The MC Grant was provided to schools in accordance with the number of boarders with MC and the tier of support they required and it included a minimum provision per school per annum (basic provision). With effect from the 2017/18 school year, the EDB further extended the MC Grant to cover day students with MC and a basic provision was also given. In other words, from the 2017/18 school year onwards, a special school would receive both the MC Grant for boarders and the MC Grant for day students, together with the respective basic provisions, to cater for a child with MC who is both a day-student and boarder of the school. In the 2019/20 school year, the basic provision of the MC Grant for boarders and the basic

provision of the MC Grant for day students are the same, which ensure that the schools could employ at least one additional supporting staff to provide the needed support. The considerable additional resource for supporting students with MC would enable the special schools to employ additional staff (such as janitor staff, health care worker, etc.), procure health care services, and/or arrange training for their staff. Schools have been advised to use the MC Grant to support the day students and boarders with MC according to the principle of “individual calculation and holistic deployment”.

In terms of professional support, the HA has all along been offering the “Children with Medical Complexity Community Support Programme” (CCSP) to support special schools in catering for their boarders with MC. Under this Programme, the CCSP coordinators/Advanced Practicing Nurses (APNs) will pay regular visits to special schools admitted boarders with MC and provide the school staff with training and support services, such as health talks and train-the-trainer programmes, to empower them to take care of the students with MC. The para-medical staff such as nurses, PTs, OTs and speech therapists in special schools would work in collaboration with the APNs of the HA to support the boarders with MC, no matter they are 5-day or 7-day boarders. The joint effort of the professional staff of the HA and the special schools could ensure quality services for the boarders with MC. Although CCSP cover solely boarders with MC, owing to the cross-fertilisation effect, the para-medical staff of special schools could apply their knowledge and practical skills in supporting boarders with MC to cater for the needs of the day students with MC in school. Teachers, school-based EPs, school social workers and other non-teaching staff would also work with the para-medical staff as a team to support the day students with MC in a proper manner.

In sum, special schools are provided with additional resources and professional support to cater for their boarders with MC. We do not see that the provision of support for them is a concern for schools to operate 7-day boarding service. As regard the support for their day students with MC, some special schools may receive extra amount of MC grant should each of their day students suspected to be with MC can be assessed and have their medical needs confirmed by the HA. As mentioned in our reply to Q(15) below, the EDB and the Paediatric Department of HA would work jointly to iron out the issue as far as possible.

- 15) According to paragraph 4.14, some schools may be eligible for additional amount of the Additional Support Grant for Day Students and Day Students cum Boarders with Medical Complexity but have not submitted the suspected medical complexity cases for medical assessment. Also, the

arrangement with the Hospital Authority ("HA") for conducting medical assessments remains a one-off ad hoc task.

- (a) According to paragraph 4.16, EDB will continue to explore with the HA the feasibility of regularizing the medical assessment arrangement and collect data from the eligible special schools to ensure that the Additional Support Grant for Day Students and Day Students cum Boarders with Medical Complexity can meet their operational need. What is the progress so far? What measures will EDB take to avoid recurrence of similar problem in the future?
- (b) Will EDB put forward a review system to ensure sufficient amount of Additional Support Grant for Day Students could meet the demands, as well as preventing possible problems, such as insufficient funding in the future? If yes, what are the details? If no, why not?

(a) and (b)

The EDB will continue to work closely with the HA to explore the feasibility of regularising the medical assessment arrangement. The EDB has discussed the issue with the HA in a meeting after the release of the Audit Report in October 2019. Meanwhile, the EDB will continue to collect data from the eligible special schools with a view to ensuring that the Day MC Grant can meet their operational needs.

- 16) According to paragraph 4.20, Audit noted that the inclusion of ceiling hoists in the furniture and equipment list for the new special school in Tung Chung would give rise to inconsistent provision of funding support by EDB to existing special schools and the new special school. Has the furniture and equipment list been improved and the arrangements of funding support simplified? Will EDB regularly review and update the list?

In the new special school project for children with MiID, MoID and SID in Tung Chung, the EDB had recommended the inclusion of ceiling hoists in the furniture and equipment (F&E) list. It was then approved by the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB) on a project basis. The new school could use its Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant (EOEBG) to fully cover the recurrent cost of the ceiling hoists. F&E procurement lists for new special school projects are prepared on a project basis so as to better cater for the specific needs of the students with SEN concerned. We would continue to keep in view the latest teaching and learning needs of students with SEN and prepare F&E procurement lists of individual special school projects accordingly in future.

For the existing special schools which had used their own funding to install the ceiling hoists previously, they can use their EOEBG surplus to top up no more than 25% of the recurrent cost of non-standard items, such as the ceiling hoists. Such practice is in line with the established rules of EOEBG usage, and is applicable to all aided schools. The EDB will examine the existing provisions and explore feasible ways, as appropriate, to streamline the arrangements of funding support to the special schools to cover the recurrent cost of the non-standard items endorsed by FSTB in the new special school projects.

17) According to paragraph 4.26, many students had their years of study extended by schools after their difficulties in school leaving arrangements were taken into account as one of the factors. In each of the five school years from 2013-2014 to 2017-2018, these students represented 42.7% to 56.8% (averaging 48.6%) of the total number of students who extended their years of study.

- (a) Does EDB agree that this reflects the situation that many special school students have remained in schools unnecessarily, which is not in the best interest of the students? Has EDB taken any measures to improve the situation?
- (b) Was EDB aware of the unusual extension of years of study before Audit raised the matter? If yes, what measures has EDB taken to address the problem? If no, why not?
- (c) For future planning and projection of demand for rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities, how is EDB going to ensure that enrolment demand of special schools leavers can be satisfied? What additional measures will be taken to strengthen the support for special school students on their school leaving arrangements?
- (d) What is the service scope and period of school leaving service? How can EDB and the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") ensure that the special schools leavers have a guaranteed quality of life during the waiting period?

(a) and (b)

Under the improvement measures on extension of years of study (EoS) introduced in the 2010/11 school year, the EDB provides special schools with a "pre-set quota" of their respective types so that the schools can have sufficient capacity to cater for students who need to extend their years of study. Special schools are allowed to exercise school-based professional judgment and arrange for students with such a need to extend their years of study according to the objective criteria jointly set by the EDB and the special school sector. General speaking, the approved cases should have genuine needs for extending their years of study. However, throughout the years, we learnt from special schools that quite a number of the cases in

which the students were not able to secure appropriate post-school placement. The EDB considered that the situation was unsatisfactory and had been advising schools to kick start applying the post-school services for their students as early as possible. In order to facilitate direct communication among special schools, Vocational Training Council (VTC), SWD and EDB, the EDB took the lead to set up a communication platform to discuss issues related to post-school placement for special school students in the 2017/18 school year. Starting from that school year, the parties meet annually to exchange the latest information about each other's work in arranging post-school placement for special school students and to allow special schools to update VTC and SWD of the demand of their students for post-school services to for planning purpose. In response to DoA's recommendation, the EDB will keep on working in collaboration with the SWD, VTC and special schools so that appropriate assistance could be provided to special school students in respect of their post-school arrangements.

(c) and (d)

Currently, the school for children with HI, PD schools, MiID schools and MoID schools would refer their prospective school leavers to VTC for assessment to determine which types of post-school institutions or rehabilitation services are more suitable for them. Taking into consideration the requirements of different post-school services, schools would help students submit applications for post-school placement at the age of 15 the earliest in accordance with their interests, capabilities and needs and with parental consent. It is an established practice that the EDB provides the projected number of special school leavers to VTC for planning purpose annually. Upon request, the EDB will also provide SWD with the relevant figures for their reference and planning for the provision of various services for special school leavers, such as sheltered workshops, supported employment service, integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres, etc. As mentioned above, from the 2017/18 school year onwards, the EDB, SWD, VTC and special schools meet annually to discuss issues related to post-school placement for special school leavers. Latest development of various post-school services for special school leavers and relevant information would be shared at the platform. It is expected that through the joint effort of the parties, the support for the special school students in applying for the appropriate post-school placement could be strengthened.

- 18) According to paragraph 4.30(b), SWD will continue to increase around 1 900 places of Day Activity Centre and Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centre from financial years 2019-2020 to 2023-2024. What is the progress so far? Do SWD and EDB have other measures to provide assistance to special school students in their school leaving arrangements?

As mentioned in the reply to Q(17), the latest development of the services under SWD would be introduced at the annual meeting on post-school placement for special school leavers among the EDB, SWD, VTC and special schools. Special schools would make use of the latest information about the increase in places of the related services to discuss with students' parents the appropriate post-school placement for their children and help them to apply for the services at appropriate juncture.

Education Bureau
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