



本函檔號 Our Ref.: SWD/COR/4-35/2

來函檔號 Your Ref.: CB4/PAC/R73

電話號碼 Tel. No.: 2892 5555

傳真號碼 Fax No.: 2838 0125

7 January 2020

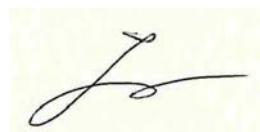
Mr Anthony CHU
Clerk to the Legislative Council Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Mr CHU,

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

I refer to your letters dated 19 and 20 December 2019 in respect of the above subject. Social Welfare Department's reply to the questions set out in these two letters are at Annex.

Yours sincerely,



(Mrs Helen KWOK)
for Director of Social Welfare

c.c. Secretary for Education (Attn: Mr Godwin LAI) – fax no.: 3579 4054
Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury – fax. no.: 2147 5239
Director of Audit – fax. no.: 2583 9063

Questions concerning Report No. 73 of the Director of Audit
Chapter 5 – Special Education

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

Question 19: In accordance with paragraph 2.26, the utilization of boarding places in residential homes of schools for social development ("SSDs") for girls decreased from 73% in school year 2014-2015 to 43% in school year 2018-2019, and the number of vacant boarding places for girls increased from 55 in school year 2014-2015 to 153 in school year 2018-2019. According to paragraph 2.34 and 2.36, Director of Social Welfare agreed to keep in view the utilization of boarding places in residential homes of SSDs and continue to take measures to make good use of the vacant boarding places where appropriate.

(a) Please state the reasons of decrease in the utilization of boarding places in residential homes of SSDs for girls.

(b) What measures has the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") taken? Has the utilization of boarding places increased?

Answer 19: Residential homes of SSDs provide intensive support for students of the co-located SSDs who have moderate to severe emotional and behavioural difficulties and cannot adequately be taken care of by their families because of various family problems or crises.

Regarding the utilisation of boarding places in residential homes of SSDs for girls, the decrease in utilisation is due mainly to a decrease in recent years in the number of girls assessed as having the need for this service. To improve the utilisation of these residential homes, SWD and the service operators, in consultation with the Education Bureau (EDB), have put forth the following measures -

- (a) admitting girls from a wider range of age and educational level; and
- (b) setting aside 32 places at one of the residential homes to serve girls studying or working in the community, in addition to girls studying at the adjoining SSD.

The utilisation rate of girls' homes has since risen to 60.7% in the third quarter of 2019.

For boys' residential homes at SSD, their utilisation has been high in recent years (average 78% from 2014/15 to 2018/19, 82% in 2017/18 and 2018/19; see Table 12, Chapter 5 of Audit Report No.73).

EDB and SWD will continue to monitor the utilisation of the residential homes at SSDs and introduce changes to meet changing societal needs and the needs of specific cases. For instance, the following measures have been taken in recent years -

- (a) more active deployment of short-term adjustment programmes at SSDs and corresponding boarding plan for students whose behavioural problems are expected to improve and ready to return to their original schools shortly after receiving the services at SSDs;
- (b) under special circumstances, extending residential placement for students who have completed Secondary 3 (and hence should normally be independent for self-care requiring no more residential service) to Secondary 4; and
- (c) under special circumstances, providing short-term extended stay for students who should have been discharged due to school transfer or open employment but are in need of short-term extended stay to facilitate their transition.

Part 4: Grants and support for special education

Question 20: 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.

What is the service scope and period of school leaving service? How can EDB and SWD ensure that the special schools leavers have a guaranteed quality of life during the waiting period?

Answer 20: SWD subvents non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide the following rehabilitation services to facilitate persons with disabilities aged 15 or above (including special school leavers) to integrate into the community, develop their abilities and cope with changes.

Day Activity Centres (DACs) provide day training for persons with disabilities to acquire self-care skills, social skills and simple work skills, aimed at enabling them to become more independent in their daily living and social functioning, and preparing them for transition to other forms of rehabilitation service or care.

Sheltered Workshops (SWs), Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres (IVRSCs) and Integrated Vocational Training Centres (IVTCs) provide one-stop vocational rehabilitation services catered to the needs of persons with disabilities. Supported Employment (SE) and On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities support persons with disabilities who are ready for employment in securing and sustaining open employment, through tailored training covering job skills, job attachment and job trial, while providing incentives (e.g. wage subsidy) to encourage employers to offer job opportunities to persons with disabilities.

For persons with disabilities (including special school leavers) who have applied for and are awaiting day or

vocational rehabilitation services, they may utilise the community support services provided by District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities (DSCs), Social and Recreational Centres for the Disabled (S&RCs), Support Centres for Persons with Autism (SPAs), Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities, Integrated Support Centres for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities, Day Care Services for Persons with Severe Disabilities, Parents/Relatives Resource Centres (PRCs) and residential and day respite services. The services cover casework counselling, individual care and nursing, rehabilitation training and exercise, social competence training, respite service, escort service, financial assistance for renting respiratory support medical equipment and purchasing medical consumables.

The above community support services facilitate persons with disabilities (including special school leavers) to live in the community and develop their ability to work. When they become unable to live independently and/or cannot adequately be taken care of through their own means or by their carers/family members, they may apply for suitable residential care services.

To strengthen community support for persons with disabilities and their carers, the Government will increase the number of SPAs from three to five and the number of PRCs from 12 to 19 in the first quarter of 2020, and the number of DSCs from 16 to 21 in 2019-20 to 2021-22. Besides, as announced in the 2019 Policy Address, the Government will provide additional manpower for S&RCs to enhance their function in providing community support, particularly for carers. The Government will also implement a two-year pilot scheme on community care services with a view to meeting the needs of persons with severe disabilities having intensive care needs and living at home, by integrating in a flexible manner the services of day care centres and home care services.

Question 21: 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?

Answer 21: For the provision of about 1 900 additional places in DACs and IVRSCs from 2019-20 to 2023-24, around 890 places will be provided in 2019-20, among which 52 DAC places and 466 IVRSC places have commenced service as at 20 December 2019. In 2020-21, around 210 places, including 65 DAC places and 145 IVRSC places, will be provided. The remaining 800 places will be progressively provided in 2021-22 to 2023-24.

SWD will continue to review the service demand of persons with disabilities (including special school leavers) for day training and vocational rehabilitation services, and strengthen the service capacity as appropriate.

With regard to other measures, SWD has been supporting EDB in organising the “Attachment Programme to NGO Rehabilitation Services” (the Programme) for students with intellectual disability who are studying in schools for children with intellectual disability (including the school for children with visual impairment cum intellectual disability) and special schools for children with physical disability, by liaising with NGOs operating day training and vocational rehabilitation services to offer attachment places to participating students. The Programme aims at familiarising participating students with the training offered by SWs, IVRSCs, IVTCs, SE and DACs so that the students may get better prepared for their future placement, and special schools may formulate appropriate school programmes for students interfacing with SWs, IVRSCs, IVTCs, SE and DACs.

SWD will continue to join EDB to review the needs of special school students for rehabilitation services, strengthen support for students on school leaving arrangements, and update and promote rehabilitation services through the

following means -

- (a) the annual joint meeting convened by EDB with relevant stakeholders including SWD, Hong Kong Special Schools Council, Vocational Training Council (VTC) as members;
- (b) the annual meeting of the Task Force on Provision of Education in Special Schools (Task Force) convened by EDB, which serves as a communication channel between EDB, the education sector, parents' groups and the welfare sector on matters relating to the provision of education services in special schools as well as measures to strengthen support for special school students and leavers; and
- (c) the annual Seminar on Exit Pathway for Special School Leavers convened by EDB for special school personnel, at which SWD and VTC are invited to provide up-to-date information on services for special school leavers. SWD will continue to liaise with EDB to invite NGOs concerned to share information on strengthening life planning for special school leavers.

Question 22: **Has SWD made an analysis on the reasons for refusing applications by current students at SSDs for seven-day boarding and considered providing an appeal mechanism for these cases?**

Answer 22: The Central Co-ordinating Referral Mechanism (CCRM) offers a central point to receive referrals for admission to SSD/residential homes. Jointly managed by EDB and SWD, CCRM is responsible for vetting applications and arranging appropriate services for applicants in SSDs/residential homes. A vetting committee under CCRM, comprising an educational psychologist, an educational counsellor, an inspector from EDB responsible for referral and placement, and a social worker from SWD, vets each referral to decide on the suitability of individual students for placement in SSDs/residential homes.

In the past two years (i.e. 2018 and 2019), the vetting committee rejected only two applications referred by social workers from current SSD students for secondary school placement in SSD cum residential home (seven-day boarding service) after their completion of primary school studies in SSD, as both students had shown steady improvement in learning and conduct after receiving the service at SSD cum residential home and were assessed by educational professionals that they could benefit from training in ordinary secondary schools with support services. Upon the explanation given by the vetting committee, the referring social workers agreed with the decision and arranged for both students to study in ordinary secondary schools.

As background, under CCRM, applications for admission to SSDs/residential home are made by social workers, student guidance personnel, educational psychologists, clinical psychologists or psychiatrists (hereinafter known as “referrers”) of the students who assess from their professional point of view the need for the referrals. The role of the vetting committee is to centralise and review all the applications to ensure that the education and residential arrangements meet the needs of individual students. In the course of vetting, the vetting committee would discuss with the referrers about the educational and residential needs of the students, and in case of doubt, would request supplementary information such as assessment from psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or educational psychologist to facilitate a review of the students’ suitability to receive the service of SSDs/residential homes.

In case the referrer cannot provide the supplementary information required to justify the service need or the vetting committee considers the student not suitable for the service sought, the vetting committee would suggest alternative service arrangements or other support services that can help meet the student’s needs. Given such intensive professional exchanges among the vetting committee, the referrers and the receiving SSDs/residential homes, all students would eventually be matched with appropriate services and no request for appeal has ever been

raised over the years. Given the above, there has been no request by stakeholders to set up an appeal mechanism for the CCRM and we do not consider there is a need to do so either.

Social Welfare Department
January 2020