

Special Education

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the Education Bureau's work in the implementation of special education and Social Welfare Department's work in connection with special education.

2. Special educational needs refer to the needs of students arising from various types of disabilities. The Education Bureau classifies special educational needs into nine types, namely: (a) visual impairment; (b) hearing impairment; (c) physical disability; (d) intellectual disability; (e) specific learning difficulties; (f) attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder; (g) autism spectrum disorders; (h) speech and language impairment; and (i) mental illness. The Administration adopts a dual-track mode in implementing special education. Children with more severe or multiple disabilities are placed in special schools for intensive support, subject to the assessment and recommendations of the specialists and with parents' consent. Other children with special educational needs who can participate in learning and daily activities in ordinary schools receive integrated education in ordinary schools.

3. Aided special schools receive subvention from the Education Bureau under the Code of Aid for Special Schools or Code of Aid for Aided Schools. Some special schools are provided with boarding facilities to cater for the long-term residential needs of students with severe disabilities and to facilitate them to receive school education during school days. In school year 2018-2019, there were 60 aided special schools and boarding services were provided in 28 of them.¹

4. In school year 2018-2019, there were 7 939 students enrolled in the 60 special schools. Majority of the students enrolled in special schools were students with intellectual disability. The amount of expenditure on special education increased from \$2,010.8 million in financial year 2014-2015 to \$2,712.7 million in financial year 2018-2019 (35%).

¹ Of the 28 schools with boarding services, seven were schools for social development and the boarding services were provided by residential homes subvented by and under the purview of the Social Welfare Department. The boarding sections of the remaining 21 schools were subvented by and under the purview of the Education Bureau.

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5. The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit's Report:

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

- not all regions were provided with all types of special school places. The Outlying Islands region did not have schools for children with physical disability and the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region (excluding Tseung Kwan O) did not have schools for children with severe intellectual disability;
- the overall enrolment rate of eight schools for social development ("SSDs")² was not high (57% in school year 2018-2019). In school year 2018-2019, the enrolment rates of the eight SSDs ranged from 40% to 74%;
- while SSDs aimed to provide more intensive guidance to students so that they might reintegrate into ordinary schools as soon as possible, from school year 2013-2014 to 2017-2018, more than 40% of students stayed at SSDs longer than expected;
- as at 15 June 2019, 8 (29%) of 28 and 65 (63%) of 104 students with moderate intellectual disability awaiting five-day and seven-day boarding services respectively had been waiting for more than one year;
- while the Education Bureau entrusted special schools to ensure that boarding places were released by students who no longer have boarding needs, the schools expressed difficulties in reviewing boarding needs of existing boarders;

Staffing of special schools

- from school year 2014-2015 to 2018-2019, the average percentages of vacant posts were 13% for occupational therapists and 15% for physiotherapists;

² SSDs were set up to provide education for students with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural problems. Counselling service was also provided to help the students overcome their emotional and behavioural problems so that they could integrate into mainstream schools as soon as possible. The Education Bureau and the Social Welfare Department jointly managed the Central Co-ordinating Referral Mechanism to assess the needs of the students for placement in these schools and make referral where appropriate.

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- the vacancy rates of teacher assistants, cooks and workshop attendants had shown an increasing trend since school year 2016-2017;
- in school year 2018-2019, out of the 60 special schools, seven (11.6%) schools had less than half of the teachers with special education training qualification. The average percentage of teachers with special education training qualification was 70.5%, ranging from 35% to 95%;

Grants and support for special education

- all special schools were invited to apply for participating in learning circles to experiment or review the implementation of various learning and teaching strategies together. However, 33 (55%) did not apply for the participation in the learning circles. Also, the themes of the learning circles had remained unchanged for the period from the school years 2013-2014 to 2017-2018;
- arrangement with the Hospital Authority for conducting medical assessment for paediatric cases of suspected day students with medical complexity for application of Additional Support Grant for Day Students and Day Students cum Boarders with Medical Complexity³ was a one-off ad hoc task and not all the suspected cases were assessed;
- the inclusion of ceiling hoists in the furniture and equipment for a new special school in Tung Chung would give rise to inconsistent provision of funding support by the Education Bureau to existing special schools and the new special school; and
- from school year 2013-2014 to 2017-2018, significant percentages of special school leavers who had applied for vocational rehabilitation services and day training or care services⁴ were on waiting lists. Moreover, 48.6% of students had their years of study extended by schools after their difficulties in school leaving arrangements were taken into account.

³ Schools for children with moderate/severe intellectual disability, physical disability, hearing and visual impairment were eligible to apply for these grants. The Education Bureau would consider the suspected students with medical complexity put up by special schools based on the feedback from the Hospital Authority on the medical situation of the students.

⁴ Vocational rehabilitation services and day training or care services were administered by the Social Welfare Department.

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6. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses regarding provision and management of school places and boarding places, staffing of special schools and grants and support for special education. The replies from **Secretary for Education** and **Director of Social Welfare** are in *Appendices 36* and *37* respectively.

7. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.