

**LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND FACILITIES IN SPECIAL  
SCHOOLS FOR PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN**

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION (23.11.98)**

(Submitted to the Subcommittee on facilities in special schools for physically handicapped children)

1. The phenomena observed by members of the “Subcommittee on facilities in special schools for physically handicapped children” (Subcommittee) during their visit to the three schools on 18 November 1998 are only part of the problems faced by schools for physically handicapped children (PH schools). The three schools represented different stages of development in school buildings and facility provision for PH schools; Margaret Trench School representing the standards of the seventies, Pui Oi School representing standards of purpose-built PH schools in the nineties and John F. Kennedy being extended on standards of 1993. However, as members of Subcommittee so keenly noticed, varying degrees of “insufficiency”, both in the size of accommodation and in the provision of facilities, still exist in these schools. Facilities in these schools are “insufficient” to meet functional needs of their children the minute they are built, rather than being “sufficient” to meet future developmental demands.
2. The main reason for such an anomalous phenomenon lies, we believe, in how standards are being set for special schools. Almost all standard items in the Schedule of Accommodation (so called S of A) have been “borrowed” from ordinary schools, modified mainly on teacher-pupil ratio and class number basis. No consideration seems to have been made of the real-life operational needs of children on wheelchairs, rolators and other bulky ambulatory aids, nor of the wide spectrum of training needs of these children, which are met not just within the classroom sessions. Hence, most of the rooms tend to be small for efficient movement and essential facilities such as toy library, heavy and light workshop, sensory integration room (not to mention hydrotherapy pool and kitchen) are considered “above-standard” and receive no subsidy. And hence, the standard for space for one boarder in the boarding Section is 5.5 m<sup>2</sup> and not 7.5 m<sup>2</sup> as generally recommended for wheelchair users. This phenomenon is allowed to continue for so long because front-line professionals in special schools have not

been consulted either in the design nor in the revision of the standards. As long as the Education Department is not prepared to provide the professional input to the design of standards and contented not to seek the advice of the users but that of Hospital Authority staff, who hardly know the uses in a school set-up, the phenomenon of “insufficiency” will, we fear, continue.

3. A quick look at the current Schedule of Accommodation for PH schools for a standard 10-class PH schools with secondary classes (herewith attached) immediately show the following major “Omissions”:
  - a) Hydrotherapy Pool
  - b) Kitchen for day schools
  - c) Toy library
  - d) Light and heavy workshops
  - e) Mluti-sensory stimulation Room
  - f) Intecom and Call Bell System
4. The list in the Schedule also fails to address the multidisciplinary characteristics of PH schools. Everybody knows that there are many professional teams in PH schools, but the staff room provision is only based on the number of teachers. There is no staff room provision for pirsiotherapists, occupational therapists and their assistants. Nor indeed is there any provision for the work area for the newly created Teacher Assistants.
5. This approach to subvention has led to air-conditioning being considered an “above-standard” items for PH schools. Members should now understand why for children who have to wear thick protective pads, air-conditioning is a must in our schools.
6. The long-term strategy must begin with a review and revision of the existing standards in the Schedule of Accommodation and Furniture and Equipment with full involvement of special schools. These lists must be regularly revised to reflect changes in the nature of disabilities of our children and the development and advancement in education and rehabilitation.
7. For short-term solutions, those essential facilities now classified as “above- standard” should be recognized as “standard” and put under government subsidy

and provision. This would include:

- a) providing air-conditioning to ALL facilities in the school and boarding section of PH schools;
- b) taking up the responsibility of recurrent and major repairs expenses of “standard” facilities such as hydrotherapy pool, workshops, toy library and sensory integration room;
- c) upgrading the pantry to a kitchen and providing at least one cook for day schools.

8. Hong Kong has made excellent progress in the provision of quality education for children with special educational needs. Much has been invested in manpower resources in our special schools. To maximize these resources, we should provide our schools with the essential equipment and facilities. We do hope that the study of the Subcommittee will trigger off improvement in the present provision system and ultimately make better sense of the subvention of our PH schools.

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