

Panel on Education

**Motions passed under the agenda item of
"School leaving arrangements for students studying in
schools for children with intellectual disability"
at the Special Meeting on 22 June 2009
Response from Education Bureau**

- (1) Motion moved by Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him on behalf of Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan

Wording of the Motion

“That this Panel requests the Government to suspend the requirement under which the provision of aided schooling for students with intellectual disability aged 18 or above is subject to vetting and approval, and to make a decision after a year of adequate consultation and discussion.”

- (2) Motion moved by Hon Tanya CHAN

Wording of the Motion

“That, as students with intellectual disability may need a laxer timeframe for learning, and further learning opportunities should be provided for them under the new senior secondary education reform, this Panel requests the Government to:

1. abolish immediately the requirement under which the provision of aided school places for students aged 18 or above is subject to vetting and approval, so that disabled students with learning needs may continue with their studies;
2. allow one year for adequate consultation with various stakeholders, including parents, students, schools, the Hong Kong Special Schools

Council and the Special Education Society of Hong Kong etc., on the mechanism and conditions for repeating classes and leaving schools, with a view to catering for the best interests of students;

3. review whether imposing an age-based limit on the duration of studies for students with special educational needs is in breach of the law."

Education Bureau's Response

1. We fully understand the concerns raised by Members, parents and the sector about the school leaving arrangements for students studying in schools for children with intellectual disability (ID schools). Our response to the above two motions is as follows:

As students of ordinary and ID schools have different learning abilities, these two types of schools differ significantly from each other in their curriculum, class structure, resources and other administrative arrangements. It is inappropriate to make a direct comparison between the school leaving arrangements of these two types of schools. We consider the current practice of handling with flexibility applications for extension of stay of students with intellectual disability (ID) more appropriate for ID schools.

In Hong Kong, children with ID are generally admitted to school at the age of six and will have received 12 years of education by the time they reach 18. In the course of the 12 years of education, ID schools will set learning objectives for each student and draw up for him an Individualised Education Programme (IEP) having regard to the need for a more flexible learning schedule among students with ID. The learning progress of each ID student will be reviewed regularly and his education programme will be revised if necessary so as to reflect his actual learning situation and ensure that he will attain the level corresponding to his abilities by the time he leaves school. In other words, the learning programmes of students with ID are subject to revision in the light of their individual abilities and progress. Since their learning characteristics are already

catered for through curriculum adaptation as well as development of learning objectives and IEP based on their abilities and progress, there should be no need for extension of stay on the grounds of the need for a laxer timeframe for learning or failure to achieve learning outcomes.

When students approach the school leaving age, special schools will apply for vocational training, other rehabilitation or healthcare services for them according to their abilities and needs. Schools for children with mild ID and moderate ID will refer their students to the Vocational Training Council (VTC) for vocational assessment service. Schools will make reference to the recommendations after assessment and apply for their admission to the training centres or skills centres under the VTC, or refer them for waitlisting for sheltered workshops or integrated vocational training centres under the Social Welfare Department (SWD). As for schools for children with severe ID, schools will refer their students for waitlisting for rehabilitation services provided by SWD and other organisations, such as day activity centres or care and attention homes for severely disabled person, etc., according to their needs.

For the purpose of determining the number of classes to be operated in the following school year, each year EDB will ask schools to submit the number of students who are leaving school at the age of 18 and information on those who wish to extend their stay. EDB will determine the approved number of classes to be operated by the schools and handle the applications for extension of stay of students in consideration of the student enrolment, the anticipated number of new students and the number of leaving students.

Apart from allowing extension of stay for students at age 18 or above who are absent from school for half a year or more within a school year due to health or other justifiable reasons, we allow schools to let students extend their stay for one year by making use of the vacancies in the approved classes. The arrangement of raising the age for application for extension of stay from 16 to 18 has been in place since the 2002/03 school year, when the former Education Department launched the Extension of Years of Education (EYE) Programme in

ID schools. Special schools are well aware of these arrangements and have been submitting applications accordingly.

We have always been flexible and lenient in handling the applications for extension of stay of students with ID in the light of their situation, and each year EDB allows quite a number of students with ID who are aged over 18 to stay in school for their studies. On the whole, on the premise of 12-year free education, it is necessary for EDB to have a mechanism to handle the school leaving arrangements for students studying in ID schools and to inform the applicants of the results of their applications for extension of stay.

2. We also wish to take this opportunity to elaborate on the following regarding the NSS (ID) curriculum,:

- EDB established the new senior secondary academic structure for special schools after comprehensive consultations. Based on results of discussions with special schools, experts of curriculum in special education and parents, we have collected views and feedback from various stakeholders .
- In its Report *The New Academic Structure for the Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong* of May 2005, the former Education and Manpower Bureau stated in paragraph 6.12 that “The Government is committed to provide every student 12 years of schooling in the new academic structure. All students will be able to receive 6 years of secondary education.”
- In another Report *Action for the Future – Career-Oriented Studies and the New Senior Secondary Academic Structure for Special Schools* of August 2006, the then Education and Manpower Bureau pointed out explicitly that under NSS, we would provide students with ID 3 years of junior secondary education and 3 years of senior secondary education.
- Paragraph 8.10 of the above-mentioned Report also pointed out that “Parents demand that the school leaving age of 18 should be removed under NSS as

there is no similar requirement for students in ordinary schools.” On this, paragraph 8.17 responded that “For those students who are absent from schools for a long period due to health or other justifiable reasons, they can apply for repeating class just as the current practice.”

- Paragraph 9.23 of the above-mentioned Report pointed out that “NSS(ID) curriculum would not be a prolonged programme of the current basic education of students with ID. It would be age-appropriate and attainable having regard to the students’ abilities and needs”. Paragraphs 9.9 also pointed out that “for children with ID, the flexibility provided by the curriculum framework will support schools in customizing learning programmes to meet the requirements of a broad and balanced curriculum for all children. It is desirable for these students to have a strengthened IEP at different stages of learning”.

In summary, the existing academic structure of ID schools is 6 years of primary education and 4 years of junior secondary education, and the target students are those with ID aged between 6 to 15 years and 11 months. In the 2002/03 school year, we introduced 2 years of EYE for students of ID schools aged between 16 to 17 and 11 months, and enrolment in the programme is voluntary. The objectives are to assist them in smooth transition from school to training, employment and adult life. Contents of the subjects of EYE emphasize practicality and cultivation of students’ good work attitude and habit. With the implementation of NSS, EYE will be phased out by year and will end in the 2010/11 school year.

Education Bureau

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