

For information on 14 June 2010

Panel on Education

Education for Students with Special Educational Needs

Purpose

This paper briefs members on the latest development of the school leaving arrangements for students in schools for children with intellectual disability (ID schools) after the implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure, and the assessment and recognition of qualifications of these students.

Background

2. With the implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure¹, ID schools offer a 12-year academic structure for their students. It is a norm that these students complete their primary and secondary education in 12 years. Nonetheless, individual students may need to extend their years of study due to various valid reasons. All along the Education Bureau (EDB) has a mechanism in place to allow individual students in need to extend their stay at school. To tie in with the implementation of the NSS academic structure and to make the mechanism on extension of years of study (EoS) more responsive to the actual needs of students and the operation of schools, EDB has decided to deploy resources to implement improvement measures from the 2010/11 school year progressively after thorough and in-depth consultation with the special education sector, parents and relevant stakeholders.

3. The improvement measures on EoS for students of ID schools that have been put into effect include:

- (a) providing additional school places for the schools so

¹ Like ordinary secondary schools in the public sector, aided special schools have started to implement the NSS academic structure on a one-grade-per-year basis from Secondary 4 in the 2009/10 school year.

that they can have sufficient capacity to cater for students who need to extend their years of study; and

- (b) empowering schools to exercise school-based professional judgment and arrange for students with such a need and valid reasons to extend their years of study according to the objective criteria jointly set by EDB and the sector.

4. The number of additional school places is calculated according to a “pre-set quota” for various categories of ID schools, i.e. 8% for mild ID schools, 10% for moderate ID schools and 12% for severe ID schools, based on the standard capacity of the schools.

5. The valid reasons jointly set by the EDB and the special school sector are : frequent absence from school, major disruptions in learning and serious adaptation problems. These agreed valid reasons should cover most of the situations that warrant EoS. Besides, after taking into account of a basket of other specific circumstances pertaining to individual students, schools may consider cases on individual merits and allow the students to extend their years of study within the “pre-set quota”.

6. While empowering schools to exercise professional judgment on EoS for their students, we must ensure that there are sound and proper school-based procedures in place for the optimal use of resources. To this end, schools have to establish a fair, evidence-based and transparent school-based mechanism, and exercise their professional judgment according to the objective criteria and the additional school places available. Schools should also establish an appeal mechanism to handle parents’ enquiries and concerns properly. The school-based mechanism for handling EoS is required to be approved by the School Management Committee / Incorporated Management Committee. To maintain consistency among special schools in their practice, EDB has, in consultation with the sector, developed the “Guidelines for Special Schools on School-based Mechanism for Handling the Extension of Years of Study for Students” for implementation by schools.

Progress

Improvement Measures on EoS for Students of ID Schools

7. So far, the improvement measures have been implemented smoothly. Schools have established school-based mechanism for handling EoS. EDB keeps frequent dialogue with the school sector to clarify and agree on various implementation details of the new measures. Briefing and moderation meetings have also been held for special schools for alignment purpose. It is observed that ID schools in general have made prudent use of the additional school places to meet the genuine needs of students. About 500 ID students at various school levels have been approved EoS in the 2010/11 school year.

8. To determine the number of classes of the ID schools for each school year, EDB continues to take into account the anticipated demand, which is derived from the school's existing enrolment, number of anticipated referrals, number of school leavers and the number of students approved EoS. As to the class structure of each ID school, EDB specifies a total number of classes for the primary, junior secondary and senior secondary sections, and schools will organize their classes according to the educational needs of the students who actually enroll. To meet the learning needs and features of ID students, ID schools commonly adopt academic grouping by ability². More details about learning and teaching in ID schools are given in paragraphs 11 to 14 below.

9. As the improvement measures involve the operation of additional classes in special schools, additional classrooms and boarding places are required. In view of the limited school space in many special schools, EDB is implementing the improvement measures progressively according to short, medium and long term plans. In brief, full implementation will take place in schools where objective circumstances so permit. In the medium and long terms, we are examining the feasibility of carrying out conversion work in some schools and exploring other possible means, including identifying suitable sites for new schools, to meet the demand.

² Due to ID students' different capabilities and limitations, they may start at different attainment levels in a subject and have their starting point either lower or higher than those of their classmates. They could start at different learning stages and are taught in different ability groups in different subjects even within the same class. ID students progress through different zone of learning at different paces. Some could stay in one particular zone of learning without progressing to the next zone after years. Typically, different students have unequal development in different areas/strands of the subject, e.g. some may achieve higher in the listening and reading skills but have significantly low performance in the writing and speaking skills due to individual disabilities.

10. We aim to facilitate schools to implement the improvement measures as far as possible while the quality of teaching should not be unduly affected. Based on our preliminary assessment, 10 ID schools will be able to fully implement the improvement measures while 31 ID schools will require conversion works for additional classrooms and various related facilities including staff room, social worker room, speech therapy room, occupational therapy room, physiotherapy room, boarding places, etc. For these 31 schools, we are conducting further evaluation of the feasibility of such conversion works. We will keep in view the need of building new special schools having regard to the additional classrooms and related facilities that can be provided in individual schools through conversion works. During the interim period, we have worked out transitional measures with the 31 ID schools with accommodation constraints, including the adoption of floating classes and use of special rooms, to accommodate the students approved EoS.

Assessment and Recognition of Qualifications of Students in ID Schools

11. Students of ID schools are provided with learning opportunities to study Chinese Language, Mathematics, General Studies, Music, Physical Education, Visual Arts, etc. under the school-based curriculum during the stages of basic education. In addition, other components specifically added to cater for students' special needs, e.g. self care, daily living skills, resource teaching programmes, therapeutic sessions, etc. also form an important part of learning in the curriculum. The NSS(ID) curriculum has three major components: the core subjects including Chinese Language, Mathematics and Liberal Studies/Independent Living, the elective subjects such as Physical Education and Visual Arts, and Other Learning Experiences. The 12 years of education for students in ID schools refers to a continuous process in which ID students are expected to progress at individual paces with diverse achievement within various components of the curriculum in their course of studies.

12. As a long-term goal, systemic assessment will be developed to give recognition to the achievements and efforts of students with intellectual disability (ID). The involvement of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) early in the development of curriculum-related Learning Progression Framework for students with ID will ensure continuity of experiences in providing public assessment and certification of students with SEN in the long run.

13. Given that such measurable learning outcomes need to be widely adopted and agreed through extensive consultation with the stakeholders in the special education sector, the development of systemic assessment for students with ID in collaboration with HKEAA is expected to begin by 2012 the earliest (after the first cycle of NSS for ID students). At present, special schools would continue to use school-based assessment and the Student Learning Profile (SLP) as the major references reflecting students' achievements.

14. In addition to the Research and Development Project started in the 2009/10 school year for the Learning Progression Framework of the three core subjects of the adapted curriculum for students with ID, EDB also cooperates closely with the HKEAA to make preparations such as collecting feedbacks and concerns from related stakeholders in the special education sector through the Bureau's 3-year Evaluation of the NSS(ID) curriculum implementation to pave the way for exploring the development of systemic assessment for students with ID in 2012. Views and data would be collected through the evaluation on assessment of learning outcomes, possible exit pathways and qualification verification for ID students after their completion of NSS to facilitate planning the future development of systemic assessment for recognition to ID students' education achievement.

15. EDB will continue to cooperate with relevant organizations including VTC and related non-government organizations to explore various alternatives of introducing more systematic programmes to enhance the abilities of school leavers with ID to prepare them for their further studies with work career.

Advice Sought

16. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Education Bureau
June 2010