

**For discussion on
5 March 2021**

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Educational and boarding services for students provided by special schools

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on the latest situation of the educational and boarding services provided for students by aided special schools (special schools).

Background

2. The Government adopts a dual-track mode in providing special education. The Education Bureau (EDB) will, subject to the assessment and recommendation of specialists and the consent of parents, refer students with more severe or multiple disabilities to special schools for intensive support services. Other students with special educational needs (SEN) will attend ordinary schools. Currently (the 2020/21 school year), there are 61 special schools with a total of about 8 200 students enrolled. These special schools are categorised as (a) school for children with visual impairment (VI) (two schools); (b) school for children with hearing impairment (HI) (one school); (c) school for children with physical disability (PD) (seven schools); (d) school for children with intellectual disability (ID) (42 schools, admitting children with mild ID, children with moderate ID, children with severe ID, or two to three of the aforementioned types of children in accordance with the missions of respective schools); (e) school for social development (SSD) (eight schools); and (f) hospital school (one school). The numbers of students enrolled in different types of special schools are at Annex 1.

Educational services

3. The EDB has been reviewing the development of special education and allocating resources from the perspective of the education profession and learning needs of students for enhancing the quality of education of special schools. Given that the majority of special school students are children with more severe or multiple disabilities, in addition to teachers, appropriate specialist staff (such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapist assistants, registered nurses, educational psychologists,

school social workers and braillists) and non-specialist staff (such as teacher assistants, workshop attendants and artisans) are provided by the EDB for special schools to cater for the disabilities or learning difficulties of their students. The schools will optimise the use of their own manpower resources to facilitate multi-disciplinary collaboration, with a view to catering for their students with different SEN.

4. The EDB has been providing the Training Course for Special School Teachers (TCSST), a 240-hour training course specifically designed for the professional needs of special school teachers. The course instructors, in addition to teaching, will arrange lesson observations cum discussions, organise project learning and experience sharing sessions as well as practicum activities, for helping participants transfer the knowledge acquired into practical skills in a real classroom teaching environment, so as to enhance their effectiveness in caring for students with more severe or multiple disabilities. Special school teachers may also attend the training courses on catering for students with SEN pitched at basic, advanced or thematic levels (BAT Courses) that are commissioned to the tertiary institutions by the EDB, aggregating 240 contact hours. Special school teachers will only be considered for promotion upon successful completion of the above-mentioned courses or having equivalent qualification.

5. Normally, the admission age for special schools is six. With the implementation of senior secondary education under the New Academic Structure since the 2009/10 school year, special schools have been providing students with either 12-year or 13-year¹ free basic education and senior secondary education. Special schools in general adopt the curriculum framework of the Hong Kong school curriculum and make reference to the Basic Education Curriculum Guide (Primary 1 - 6) (2014) and the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide (2017) in the development of a school-based curriculum that suits the learning abilities and addresses the specific needs of their students. Effective learning and teaching strategies are also employed to cater for students' diverse learning needs. The multi-disciplinary professional teams in special schools will systematically formulate and implement individualised education programmes for students to address their needs and facilitate their learning and development, and will timely review their progress under different learning areas with an aim to assisting students to achieve their targets gradually. The schools will also guide students in life planning from the perspective of whole-person development and teach them self-care, generic and creative thinking skills etc., so as to help them achieve their potential at the developmental stages.

¹ The number of years of study for students with normal intelligence pursuing ordinary curriculum in the school for children with HI and schools for children with PD is 13 years, whereas that of students in other special schools is 12 years.

6. The school for children with VI, the school for children with HI and schools for children with PD offer ordinary curriculum to children with these disabilities who are of normal intelligence. Upon completion of Secondary 6, these students, same as students in ordinary schools, will attend the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination to continue their studies. Regarding students with ID, after completing the curriculum in special schools, school leavers with higher ability (e.g. students with mild ID) usually choose to pursue further studies, receive vocational training or enter the employment market. As for the less able school leavers (e.g. students with moderate or severe ID), their parents will help them apply for services such as Sheltered Workshop / Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centre cum Hostel for Moderately Mentally Handicapped Persons, Day Activity Centre cum Hostel for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons. All along, special schools have been helping their students plan and follow up with post-school placement in accordance with their interests, capabilities and needs. Besides, the EDB, the Vocational Training Council, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Hong Kong Special Schools Council will meet annually to keep close contact as well as share the latest development of various post-school services and relevant information, with a view to assisting special schools in applying for appropriate post-school services for students.

Boarding service

7. The objective of providing boarding service in some special schools is to cater for the students with long-term residential needs and hence facilitate their schooling during school days. The EDB assesses students' needs in light of their individual circumstances and then arranges suitable boarding service for them. In the 2020/21 school year, there are a total of 29 special schools providing boarding service, with 22² of them under the subvention of the EDB, and seven SSDs are attached with residential home services subvented by the SWD. The numbers of boarders in different types of special schools are at Annex 1.

8. The EDB determines the staff establishment of boarding sections according to the approved capacities of the boarding sections in different types of special schools. Specialist staff include wardens, assistant wardens, houseparents-in-charge, houseparents, programme workers, registered nurses, as well as auxiliary staff, such as clerical assistants, janitor staff, cooks and watchmen. Principals of special schools are also responsible for supervising the respective boarding sections, whereas wardens of the boarding sections, who

² They include two schools for children with VI, one school for children with HI, four schools for children with PD and 15 schools for children with ID.

are registered social workers, are responsible for managing the operation of the boarding sections. The school management, wardens and other specialist staff of the boarding sections should deploy their professional knowledge and uphold their professional ethics in complying with the requirements set out in the circulars issued by the EDB from time to time and make reference to the relevant guidelines in managing the boarding sections, in order to provide boarders with proper boarding and personal care services. These include rendering support in respect of students' daily living, learning, sociability and transition for promoting their personal and social development.

9. To strengthen the competence of staff in the boarding sections of special schools in catering for their boarders, the EDB has been organising relevant thematic workshops for them as well as the school teaching staff, in order to enhance their professional knowledge and skills in handling students with serious emotional and behavioural problems. Besides, the EDB and educational psychologists of schools will have regular case conferences with child psychiatrists of the Hospital Authority to discuss the intervention and management plans for students (including boarders) with serious emotional and behavioural problems. Educational psychologists of special schools will provide schools with professional advice arising from the case conferences discussion for follow-up with a view to rendering suitable support to the students (including boarders) concerned. In 2018, the EDB compiled the "Guideline on the use of physical restraint or seclusion to handle students with special educational needs having serious emotional and behavioural problems", encouraging special schools (including the boarding sections) to use positive behaviour support strategies in handling students' emotional and behavioural problems on the one hand, and on the other hand, providing schools with substantive principles and factors for consideration for observance of schools (including the boarding sections) when using physical restraint or seclusion to handle students with serious emotional and behavioural problems.

Improvement measures

10. The current-term Government have been introducing various improvement measures for special schools since its assumption of office, such as allocating purpose-specific grants, increasing additional specialist staff and improving the staff provision of boarding sections, to provide special schools with enriched resources and enhance their professional competence to effectively support students and boarders. The improvement measures introduced from the 2017/18 to 2020/21 school years are at [Annex 2](#). To further enhance the quality of education provided by special schools, in the 2021/22 school year, the EDB will continue to strengthen the support for the professional and auxiliary staff of special schools and allow flexibility in the appointment of staff to meet the needs of school operation and students. Specifically, such measures include upgrading the ranks of

occupational therapist and physiotherapist, creating a nursing officer rank, giving flexibility to schools to appoint nurses with psychiatric training, providing schools for children with mild ID with school bus driver posts, improving the rank of school bus drivers in special schools, and allowing schools with vacancies in the posts of teacher assistant, cook, school bus driver and watchman to opt for cash grants in order to recruit corresponding temporary auxiliary staff. The said cook and watchman are staff of boarding section's establishment. Special schools could flexibly opt to encash the respective vacant posts to suit their operational needs in the boarding sections. Regarding the allocation of resources, the estimated total expenditure for special education in the 2021-22 financial year is about \$3.54 billion, representing an increase of 44% over the 2017-18 financial year (i.e. \$2.46 billion) when the current-term Government took office.

Monitoring measures

11. Special schools (including their boarding sections), same as ordinary public sector schools, shall operate in compliance with the Education Ordinance, the Education Regulations as well as other related ordinances; the relevant Codes of Aid; and the circulars and guidelines issued by the EDB and the instructions from their respective school sponsoring bodies. In addition, under the "School Development and Accountability Framework", special schools must, just like other ordinary aided schools, conduct annual self-evaluation on the effectiveness of their educational services and support to students (including boarding service, if applicable) for constantly enhancing the schools' development and quality of services. The EDB has been monitoring the quality of school operations (including that of special schools and their boarding sections subvented by the EDB). For example, through external school review to understand and validate schools' self-evaluation on the effectiveness, routine school visits and daily communication with school personnel, the EDB has been offering advice to schools on various aspects, including schools' administration arrangements, daily operation and human resources. If schools are found not complying with the requirements, the EDB will request the schools to take prompt follow-up actions and make rectifications.

12. In order to strengthen the support relating to the operation of the boarding sections in special schools and enhance their quality of services, the EDB has stepped up its co-operation with the SWD to provide training for the staff of special schools (including wardens, school social workers and relevant school staff), so as to enhance their professional competence in managing the boarding sections and taking care of boarders more effectively, including early identification of high-risk cases and provision of appropriate support to them. Such training will also enable the staff to get hold of the latest information about post-school services for special school students in a more comprehensive manner. In this

connection, the EDB organised a thematic webinar for special school principals, wardens of boarding sections, social workers, school staff, etc. on 26 January 2021, inviting the SWD and an institution rendering boarding service to serve as speakers to share their experience and practices on management of boarding sections. We will continue to organise related training for staff of special schools. Besides, the EDB has prepared guidelines for boarding sections in special schools by making reference to the Code of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) and relevant guidelines issued by the SWD, with the aim of assisting special schools in managing their boarding sections in a more systematic way as well as better supporting boarders in respect of students' daily living, learning, sociability and transition to facilitate students' personal and social development. The EDB has invited the sector and the SWD to give views on the draft guidelines. It is expected the guidelines will be announced by the first quarter of 2021. With reference to the guidelines, the EDB will monitor the operation of the boarding sections in special schools in a more focused manner, and help schools continuously improve and develop their boarding service.

Conclusion

13. We will continue to enhance the support for and monitor the operation of special schools. Besides, we will also review the implementation of special education and listen to the views of the sector and different stakeholders on an on-going basis, so that improvement measures will be implemented where necessary and practicable.

Advice Sought

14. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and comment on the educational and boarding services provided for students by special schools.

Education Bureau

February 2021

**Numbers of students and boarders in aided special schools
in the 2020/21 school year
(Position as at 15 September 2020)**

School Type	Number of Schools				Number of Students	Number of Schools with Boarding Sections Note 5				Number of Boarders
Visual Impairment ^{Note 1}	2				125	2				91
Hearing Impairment	1				63	1				11
Physical Disability	7				880	4				221
Mild Intellectual Disability	12	5		1	3 314		1		1	
Moderate Intellectual Disability	14				2 188	4				
Severe Intellectual Disability ^{Note 2}	9				1	708	8			1
School for Social Development ^{Note 3}	8				572	7				433
Hospital School ^{Note 4}	1				373					

Notes:

1. The schools for children with visual impairment (VI) include one school for children with VI and one school for children with VI cum intellectual disability (ID).
2. One school for children with severe ID operates classes for children with moderate ID and provides boarding service on a pilot basis starting from the 2017/18 school year. The figures are categorised according to the respective class levels.
3. Residential homes attached to schools for social development are subvented by the Social Welfare Department.
4. The Hospital School operates classes at 19 public hospitals.
5. Schools for children with mild ID do not provide boarding service. The Hospital School provides educational services for hospitalised students, students staying in hospital do not require boarding service.

Improvement Measures for Special Schools

2017/18 school year

- Increasing the teacher-to-class ratio for aided primary, secondary schools and special schools by 0.1 across the board to provide additional teaching staff for schools to take forward various education initiatives to enhance the quality of education;
- Providing a recurrent cash grant to all public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) to strengthen their information technology (IT) staffing support for implementing e-learning and taking forward various education initiatives which would harness IT;
- Providing an Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) for special schools with less than six approved primary classes to replace the provision of the Curriculum Leadership Grant;
- Providing an occupational therapist and an occupational therapist assistant for schools for children with visual impairment (VI), the school for children with hearing impairment (HI), schools for children with mild intellectual disability (ID) and schools for children with moderate ID, so as to enhance their support for students displaying weaknesses in their fine motor skills and hand-eye co-ordination;
- Providing a speech therapist for the school for children with VI and schools for social development to enable them to develop and implement comprehensive and tailored school-based support schemes to support the special educational needs of students with speech and language impairment;
- Extending the “Additional Support Grant for Enhancing the Support for Boarders with Medical Complexity in Aided Special Schools” to cover day students and boarders with medical complexity in schools for children with VI, the school for children with HI, schools for children with moderate ID, schools for children with severe ID and schools for children with physical disability (PD); and
- Installing air-conditioning (AC) systems in standard teaching facilities (including classrooms and special rooms), student activity centres and assembly halls in public sector schools (including special schools). This arrangement also covered bedrooms, study rooms, TV/common rooms and dining/multi-purpose rooms in the boarding sections of special schools.

2018/19 school year

- Providing one additional school nurse in schools for children with ID, PD and VI cum ID, and expanding school nurse provision to cover the school for children with VI and

the school for children with HI, such that each of these schools would have a school nurse to strengthen their support for students with care needs;

- Improving the provision of school social workers (SSW) in special schools. Special schools with a capacity of 60 or less would be provided with 1 SSW and subsequently 0.5 SSW for every 30 students. Under this improvement measure, each special school would be provided with at least one SSW. Moreover, special schools would receive a unit of Consultation Service Grant per SSW to purchase consultation, supervision or other support services;
- Providing a recurrent Air-conditioning Grant for aided schools (including special schools) to cover the daily expenses of related facilities, including electricity charges and routine maintenance costs;
- Providing a Promotion of Reading Grant to public sector schools (including special schools) to support schools in strengthening the promotion of reading and encourage students to develop a good reading habit from a young age; and
- Regularising the Pilot Scheme on Promoting Interflows between Sister Schools in Hong Kong and the Mainland by providing recurrent grant and professional support to public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools (including special schools) that formed sister schools with their counterparts in the Mainland. The scheme enabled schools to plan exchange activities in a longer-term, with a view to enriching students' learning experiences and promoting teachers' professional development.

2019/20 school year

- Implementing the all-graduate teaching force policy in public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) in one go;
- Providing extra administrative manpower/resources for public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) to hire additional administrative staff for implementing the "One Executive Officer for Each School" policy; and
- Providing a recurrent Life-wide Learning Grant for public sector schools (including special schools) to support them in taking forward, on the present foundation, life-wide learning with enhanced efforts.

2020/21 school year

- Upgrading the ranks of warden and assistant warden on the establishment of boarding sections with a capacity of 40 or above, and increasing the number of assistant warden and houseparent-in-charge on the establishment correspondingly to strengthen the collaboration between the management teams of boarding sections and school sections in special schools to provide more appropriate life skills training and counselling for boarders;

- Further improving the Saturday and Sunday manning ratios for boarding sections so that special schools offering 7-day boarding service can have extra manpower to take care of their boarders;
- Providing an additional grant for the boarding sections for schools for children with PD, moderate ID, severe ID and VI cum ID to employ personal care workers or hire related services;
- Upgrading the Primary School Curriculum Leader posts in public sector primary schools (including special schools with a primary section) operating 11 or fewer classes from the provision of an Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) post or the Curriculum Leadership Grant to a Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) post;
- Enhancing the demarcation arrangements for headship rankings and the manpower arrangements of vice-principals in public sector secondary schools (including special schools);
- Including the additional teaching posts generated from the 0.1 increase in teacher-to-class ratio as from the 2017/18 school year in the calculation of promotion posts in public sector secondary schools (including special schools); and
- Improving the conversion arrangements for determining the headship ranking and provision of vice-principals/deputy heads in special schools and the manpower arrangements for vice-principals/deputy heads in special schools operating both primary and secondary sections.