

Education Bureau Circular No. 3/2010

**Improvement Measures on Extension of Years of Study
for Students of Aided Special Schools**

5 March 2010

[Note: This circular should be read by

- (a) Supervisors and heads of all aided schools for children with intellectual disability (ID schools), schools for children with physical disability (PD schools), schools for children with hearing impairment (HI schools) and the school for children with visual impairment cum intellectual disability (VI cum ID school) – for action; and
- (b) Supervisors and heads of other aided special schools and Heads of Sections – for information.]

Summary

This circular informs all aided special schools of the progressive implementation of the improvement measures on extension of years of study for students with effect from the 2010/11 school year.

Background

2. With the implementation of the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure¹, special schools offer a 12-year academic structure (including 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary and 3 years of senior secondary education) for their students with intellectual disability. As for students with normal intelligence pursuing ordinary curriculum in PD schools and HI schools, it is an academic structure of 13 years (including 10 years of basic education and 3 years of senior secondary education).

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.

3. It is a norm that students complete their primary and secondary education under the respective academic structures. There are, however, special circumstances where individual students may need to extend their years of study due to various valid reasons. All along we have 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 more responsive to the actual needs of students and the operation of schools, the Education Bureau (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 other stakeholders.

Details

4. Starting from the 2010/11 school year, the improvement measures on extension of years of study for students of special schools will include:

- (a) providing a “pre-set quota” for ID schools, PD schools, HI schools and the VI cum ID school so that the schools can have sufficient capacity to cater for students who need to extend their years of study; and
- (b) allowing 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 the EDB and the sector.

Students of special schools under the NSS academic structure will graduate from school upon completion of Secondary 6. For those who need to extend their years of study, arrangements will be made in accordance with the mechanism under the improvement measures.

“Pre-set Quota”

5. The “pre-set quota” for various types of special schools is as follows:

Types of Special Schools	Percentage of “Pre-set Quota”*	No. of Additional School Places derived from the Percentage of “Pre-set Quota”
Schools for children with mild intellectual disability (MiID schools)	8%	18 **
Schools for children with moderate intellectual disability (MoID schools)	10%	12

Schools for children with severe intellectual disability (SID schools)	12%	12
School for children with visual impairment cum intellectual disability (VI cum ID school)	12%	14
Schools for children with physical disability (PD schools)	Ordinary curriculum : 18% ID curriculum : 12%	20
Schools for children with hearing impairment (HI schools)	Ordinary curriculum : 18% ID curriculum : 12%	20

* The percentage is, in principle, based on the approved capacity in standard size schools, i.e. 12 classes for special schools admitting mainly children with ID and 13 classes for PD schools and HI schools admitting both children with normal intelligence and children with ID (whose major disability is PD or HI).

** MiID schools have started to reduce their class size from Primary 1 and Secondary 1 with effect from the 2009/10 school year. Upon their full implementation of this initiative in the 2014/15 school year, the number of additional school places will be adjusted to 15 accordingly.

6. In schools for both children with MiID and children with MoID, if they operate 6 or more approved classes in both their MiID and MoID sections, the additional school places will be calculated on the basis of the above percentages for MiID schools and MoID schools separately. Otherwise, the overall additional school places will be calculated on the basis of the percentage for either MiID schools or MoID schools, depending on which section operates more classes.

7. For PD schools and HI schools admitting both children with normal intelligence and children with ID, the additional school places will, in principle, be calculated on the basis of the approved capacity in standard size schools at 18% and 12% respectively for classes offering ordinary curriculum and ID curriculum, provided that the number of additional school places will not be less than 20.

“Valid Reasons” for Extension of Years of Study

8. The “valid reasons” jointly set by the EDB and the sector are as follows:

(i) Frequent Absence from School

Absence from school for more than one-third of the total school days in a school year due to valid reasons, such as suffering from illnesses, undergoing surgery, representing Hong Kong in competitions and attending group training, etc.;

(ii) Major Disruptions in Learning

Though present at school, the students have major disruptions in learning. For example, the students have severe emotional problems, receive therapeutic treatments, or are under drug influence, etc.; or

(iii) Serious Adaptation Problems

These include serious adaptation problems faced by newly arrived children and non-Chinese speaking students due to their learning backgrounds and language environments, etc.

9. The three “valid reasons” cover most of the situations in which students need to extend their years of study. However, we understand that a small number of students may wish to extend their years of study under special circumstances not covered by the three “valid reasons”. Schools may consider such cases on individual merits and make use of the residual quota, if any, to allow the students to extend their years of study after taking into account a basket of factors.

10. We have to emphasise that the number of additional school places under the improvement measures is the maximum limit. Schools should consider the needs of the students prudently, and it is not necessary to use up these additional school places. For students experiencing difficulties or disruptions in the learning process, schools should provide guidance and remedial support as appropriate. Extension of years of study is neither the only nor the best way. It is an exception rather than a norm.

School-based Mechanism

11. While allowing schools to exercise professional judgment on extension of years of study for their students, we must ensure that there is sound and proper school-based procedure in place for the optimal use of resources. To this end, schools should 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 the extension of years of study should be approved by the School Management Committee/Incorporated Management Committee. To ensure a certain degree of consistency among special schools in their practice, the 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 special schools. Details are at the Annex. The guidelines are available at the EDB website, and they will be subject to review and revision when necessary. (<https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/special-education/duration-of-study-in-special-schools-and-extension-of-years-of-study.html>)

Monitoring

12. To ensure the best use of the additional school places under the improvement measures to cater for students who need to extend their years of study, special schools are required to comply with the following requirements:

- (a) Each year when schools propose the class organisation for the following school year to the EDB, they should also submit the information on the students intended to be approved for extension of years of study as required, for EDB's consideration in approving the number of classes for the following school year;
- (b) Schools should keep on file documents supporting the decisions to allow the students to extend their years of study for inspection by the EDB and/or other departments. Such documents include reports by medical professionals/other specialists, school records of case conferences on the students and teaching plans for handling the students' problems, etc.; and
- (c) Schools should report the academic structure status² of all students each year for the EDB to have a complete profile of every student. Such information includes the class level assigned, any approval for extension of years of study and the reasons, etc.

In case of any unreasonable arrangement found, the EDB will demand justifications and supporting documents from the schools, and where appropriate, instruct the schools to rectify the situation.

Progressive Implementation of the Improvement Measures

13. The improvement measures involve the operation of additional classes in special schools. This will call for additional classrooms and boarding places. In view of the limited school space in most of the special schools, the EDB will implement 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 will examine the feasibility of carrying out conversion work in some schools and explore other possible means, including identifying suitable sites for new schools, to meet the demand.

² Special schools should give each student (including any student admitted during the school year) an academic structure status at the time of admission. In general, the student should be assigned to the same class level with other children of the same age. Under exceptional circumstances, however, schools will make other arrangements as appropriate, taking into consideration factors such as the student's ability, background and years of education received. After admission, the status will be adjusted on a one-grade-per-year basis, unless the student is allowed to extend his/her years of study in a particular school year, where his/her academic structure status in the next school year will be the same as that in the previous school year.

14. For individual schools with difficulty in full implementation of the improvement measures, we will continue to discuss with them the transitional measures, including the use of special rooms as classrooms, etc. We aim to provide schools with as much space as practicable to implement the improvement measures on the premises that the quality of teaching will not be significantly affected.

Enquiry

15. For enquiries, please contact Special Education Support 1 Section or Special Education Support 2 Section.

Miss P L WU
for Permanent Secretary for Education

Guidelines for Special Schools on School-based Mechanism for Handling the Extension of Years of Study for Students

(for implementation by aided schools for children with intellectual disability (ID schools), schools for children with physical disability (PD schools), schools for children with hearing impairment (HI schools) and the school for children with visual impairment cum intellectual disability (VI cum ID school))

Basic Principles

1. Students of special schools under the New Senior Secondary (NSS) academic structure will graduate from school upon completion of Secondary 6. The norm is that students with ID complete the primary and secondary education in 12 years, and students with normal intelligence pursuing ordinary curriculum in PD schools and HI schools complete the primary and secondary education in 13 years.
2. Individual students may need to extend their years of study due to “valid reasons”¹, and schools are provided with “pre-set quota” of additional places to address such needs.
3. In cases where individual students need to extend their years of study due to other reasons, schools should exercise their school-based professional judgment according to the objective criteria and the additional school places available. In principle, residual quotas should normally be used to cater for students who are in need and are due to leave school in the current school year.
4. Schools should consider each case prudently according to the objective criteria to ensure that the “pre-set quota” is used properly. It is not necessary for schools to use up the additional school places in each school year. Neither should they exceed the quota in any case.

Screening of Students

Schools should make a preliminary decision as to whether a student should proceed to a higher grade, leave school or extend his/her years of study through a meeting (hereinafter called the “Student Progression Meeting”). The meeting should be held in or before March in each school year and information on students who will leave school or extend their years of study should be submitted to the Education Bureau (EDB) according to the date to be set by the EDB. Normally, the date will be set at March in each school year.

Attendees at the Student Progression Meeting

School head, teachers and specialists.

¹ The three “valid reasons” are the objective criteria set after the EDB had numerous deliberations with the sector and parents.

Mechanism on Decision-making

The decision on whether a student should proceed to a higher grade, leave school or extend his/her years of study should be made by all the attendees according to the objective criteria. In case no consensus can be reached after thorough professional deliberations, a decision may be made by voting. In case of a tie in voting, the chairman of the meeting will make the final decision.

Appeal Mechanism on Extension of Years of Study

1. The parents or guardians appeal to the school supervisor in writing;
2. The school supervisor and two school managers² form an appeal panel to make the final decision (The school head should give a clear description of the background to the panel, including the objective criteria used in the school-based mechanism, etc.);
3. The school supervisor announces the result of the appeal in writing or by other means accepted by the parents within two weeks after receipt of the appeal.

“Valid Reasons” for Extension of Years of Study

1. The students have been absent from school for more than one-third of the total school days in a school year due to valid reasons, such as suffering from illnesses, undergoing surgeries, representing Hong Kong in competitions and attending group training, etc.;
2. The students have major disruptions in learning. For example, the students have severe emotional problems, receive therapeutic treatments and are under drug influence, etc.; or
3. The students experience serious adaptation problems. These include serious adaptation problems faced by newly arrived children and non-Chinese speaking students due to their learning backgrounds and language environments, etc.

Points to Note

- The foregoing “valid reasons” should be supported by relevant documentary proof, including reports by medical professionals/other specialists, school records of case conferences on the students and teaching plans for handling the students’ problems, etc. These documents should be kept on file for inspection by the EDB and/or other departments.
- If a student has been allowed to extend his/her years of study before and the Student Progression Meeting considers that there are genuine and sufficient justifications for further extension after prudent deliberations, the school should, having regard to the actual availability of the “pre-set quota”, refer the case to the School Management Committee/Incorporated Management Committee for a final decision, together with sufficient evidence and explanations.

² The EDB encourages schools to invite parent manager(s) to sit on the appeal panel.

Objective Criteria for Considering the Use of Residual Quota

Students may wish to extend their years of study under special circumstances not covered by the three “valid reasons”. Schools should consider such cases on individual merits and make use of the residual quota, if any, to allow the students to extend their years of study after taking into account a basket of factors. In principle, residual quota should normally be used to cater for students who are due to leave school in the current school year. The factors that the schools may consider include:

1. Learning ability and progress of the student
2. Professional assessment reports (including, among others, reports of psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist and social worker and vocational assessment reports)
3. School leaving arrangements
4. Family circumstances (e.g. abrupt changes in family circumstances)
5. Age of the student
6. Behaviour and emotion
7. Learning motivation
8. Schooling history before admission (e.g. students admitted during the school year)
9. Health condition
10. Supply and demand of boarding places (applicable to schools with boarding service)
11. Others (Please provide details, e.g. failure to achieve the expected learning outcomes)

Points to Note

- Similarly, schools should keep on file relevant documentary proof, including reports by medical professionals/other specialists, school records of case conferences on the students and teaching plans for handling the students’ problems, etc. for inspection by the EDB and/or other departments.
- If a student has been allowed to extend his/her years of study before and the Student Progression Meeting considers that there are genuine and sufficient justifications for further extension after prudent deliberations, the school should, having regard to the actual availability of the “pre-set quota”, refer the case to the School Management Committee/Incorporated Management Committee for a final decision, together with sufficient evidence and explanations.

Revision of the List of Students for Extension of Years of Study

Under normal circumstances, schools should submit the list of students approved for extension of years of study according to the date set by the EDB, which is normally in March of each school year. Subsequent changes to the list are normally not allowed. If there is/are student(s) meeting the following conditions, and the school has residual quotas, schools may put up requests for including such student(s) in the list of students approved for extension of years of study:

- (1) application for extension of years of study having been rejected but subsequently the appeal was accepted by the school; or
- (2) after the school's submission of the list of students approved for extension of years of study in March, a student is absent from school frequently owing to "valid reasons" and thus meets the criteria for extension of years of study; or
- (3) after the school's submission of the list of students approved for extension of years of study in March, there is significant change in the condition of a student which creates a major disruption in his/her learning and s/he thus meets the criteria for extension of years of study; or
- (4) after the final examination, a student pursuing the ordinary curriculum is confirmed by the school to have highly unsatisfactory learning results and hence needs an extension of years of study; or
- (5) school leavers of current year who were put on the waiting list for extension of years of study after deliberation under the school-based mechanism.

Schools are required to submit information of the respective cases to the EDB on or before 1 August of each school year. Late submission will normally not be accepted. Schools have to provide full justifications for each case, and prove the necessity of the students concerned for extension of years of study through the Student Progression Meeting. For cases requiring further extension of years of study, the final decision has to be made by the School Management Committee/Incorporated Management Committee.

Education Bureau

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