Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

Prepared by
The Curriculum Development Council

Published for use in schools by
The Education Bureau
HKSARG
2024

Membership of
the Curriculum Development Council
Committee on Special Educational Needs
(2023-2025)

Chairperson:	Ms MOK Oi-ling	
Vice-chairperson:	Mr CHEUNG Wing-fat, Raymond	
Members:	Ms CHEUNG Tsui-shan, Shirley	
	Ms CHIM In-leng	
	Ms CHU Pui-man, Peggy	
	Mr FUNG Kam-chan	
	Dr HAN Yvonne Ming-yee	
	Ms HO Pui-man, Queenie	
	Ms KWAN Kit-man, Canossa	
	Ms LAI Wan-yim	
	Dr LEE Tai-hoi	
	Mr MAK Hon-lung	
	Ms NG Nga-chi	
	Mr PU Chun-ngai	
	Mr TSE Yu-chung	
	Mr TUNG Sau-chung	
	Ms YANG Shun-lai	
Secretary:	Mr CHU Yiu-tung	(from 15.1.2024)
	Mr YEUNG Ka-wai, Chris	(till 12.1.2024)

Membership of the Ad Hoc Committee on Curriculum Guide for Special Schools (from 26.9.2018)

Chairperson:	Mr KWOK Wing-hang	(till 31.8.2021)
Convenor:	Mr CHEUNG Wing-fat, Raymond	(from 13.9.2021)
	Ms WONG Siu-ping, Ivy	(till 31.8.2021)
Members:	Ms CHIM In-leng	(from 19.12.2022)
	Mr CHU Yiu-tung	(from 15.1.2024)
	Mr CHUNG Kwok-tung, Michael	(till 8.6.2022)
	Dr FOK Chun-wing	
	Mr HO Ngau-tin	
	Ms HO Pui-man, Queenie	(from 9.6.2022)
	Mr HUI Ka-yan	
	Mr LAM Tat-yan	(till 31.8.2019)
	Mr LEE Lap-chi	(till 31.8.2023)
	Mr LO Kwok-pong	(from 15.7.2019 to 23.8.2020)
	Ms MOK Oi-ling	
	Ms NG Yuet-ngor	
	Prof SIN Kuen-fung, Kenneth	
	Mr SUEN Yau-man	(from 4.12.2019)
	Ms TANG Pui-see	(till 5.7.2019)
	Dr WONG Kin-hang	
	Ms WONG Lai-ting	(from 28.10.2021 to 12.9.2022)
	Ms WONG Man-yi	(from 28.10.2021)
	Ms WONG Tin-ling	(from 29.4.2019)
	Mr WU Chung-hing	(till 31.8.2021)
	Mr YEUNG Ka-wai, Chris	(from 24.8.2020 to 12.1.2024)
Co-opted Member:	Mr SHEK Wai-keung	(from 4.12.2019)
Secretary:	Ms NG Ngai, Bell	

CONTENTS

Chapter 5 Assessing Progress and Attainment Page

Chapter 6 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum Page

Chapter 7 Beyond School — Exit Pathways, Opportunities and Outcomes Page

Resources i-ii

Related Websites ii-iv

Chapter 1

Introduction

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

1

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this Guide

This guide addresses a series of key topics that are of central concern in curriculum development in aided special schools (hereafter "special schools"). These topics include:

- aspects of curriculum planning in special schools
- addressing specific learning elements of the curriculum for students with a range of needs and difficulties
- developing effective approaches to learning and teaching
- assessing learning progress and attainment
- monitoring, evaluation and review of the curriculum
- what lies beyond school – exit pathways, opportunities and outcomes

This guide is intended to support staff in special schools in the processes of curriculum planning and development. The guide places particular emphasis on **curriculum adaptation and differentiation** and is designed to help special schools ensure that their students receive their entitlement to a full range of relevant experiences and learning opportunities while their diverse and individual needs are being addressed.

1.2 Target Audience for the Guide

This guide is intended for school professionals who are responsible for planning, implementation and review of the curriculum in special schools. This may include:

- school principals and vice principals
- curriculum leaders
- subject panel heads and members
- subject teachers and class teachers
- other professionals, such as therapists and educational psychologists
- teacher trainers and student teachers in special education

Members of staff in special schools who are involved in aspects of the planning, implementation and evaluation cycle will find ideas in this guide highly relevant to their work. Experience suggests that policy and practice are enhanced when wider groups of staff are involved in curriculum planning activities through participatory approaches.

1.3 How Should the Guide be Used

This guide sets out key principles for curriculum development for the staff working in special schools for students with specific categories of difficulty including:

- intellectual disability (ID)
- hearing impairment (HI)
- visual impairment (VI)
- physical disability (PD)
- emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD)
- medical conditions resulting in hospitalisation

As some students in special schools may have combinations of difficulties (e.g. intellectual disability cum hearing impairment), staff should study this guide as well as other reference documents for curriculum planning for students with co-morbid, complex and severe difficulties.

It is recommended that this guide should be accessed initially by members of school staff with leading responsibilities in relation to curriculum planning and development (e.g. curriculum leaders or subject panel heads). These colleagues will then be able to convene, with the support of the school principal and vice principal(s), small working groups of teachers on curriculum development to work through, discuss and implement the principles, strategies and processes set out in this guide. The effective use of this guide cannot be carried out by single individuals. Schools should adopt participatory approaches to exploring and developing curriculum development plans based on the ideas in this guide collaboratively in the working groups.

It is also important to note that this guide does not offer a prescribed approach to curriculum development, planning and teaching. It is designed to support special schools in providing a curriculum that responds specifically to the needs and interests of their own school community. Therefore, working groups of school staff should develop, review and adapt the curriculum development plans continuously based on the recommendations in this guide to suit their students' needs and the school's context.

1

1.4 The Direction of Curriculum Development in Special Schools

Following the Learning to Learn curriculum reform in Hong Kong that started in 2001, the concept of "one curriculum framework for all" was initiated with the release of *The New Academic Structure for Senior Secondary Education and Higher Education – Action Plan for Investing in the Future of Hong Kong* (2005). The senior secondary curriculum was implemented in both ordinary and special schools in 2009 and the Education Bureau (EDB) took the lead in promoting and supporting new trends and developments in both mainstream and special education. Throughout these years, the development of the Hong Kong school curriculum has advanced with times and moved to a new phase of ongoing renewal to enable schools to keep abreast of local, regional as well as global changes for the ultimate benefits of student learning.

Under the principle of "one curriculum framework for all", students in special schools are now also entitled to the learning experiences and opportunities within a curriculum framework that is shared with their age peers in ordinary schools. Special schools should therefore make reference to the central curriculum documents and develop their school-based curriculum according to the abilities and needs of their students, so as to cater for the diverse learning needs of students. However, the guides which served as the references for supporting learning and teaching for students in different categories of special schools were written before the implementation of the curriculum reform. These guides are therefore unable to connect to the principle of "one curriculum framework for all" and are significantly out of alignment with actual practice in the special schools.

The *Primary Education Curriculum Guide* (PECG) and the *Secondary Education Curriculum Guide* (SECG) were updated in 2024 and 2017 respectively. These guides are important references to staff in both ordinary schools and special schools working for ongoing development and renewal of school-based curriculum. However, special schools are also faced with particular issues in curriculum development and aspects of learning and teaching that are specific to students with individual differences and difficulties. This guide sets out to address those particular and specific issues and emphasises:

- the **importance** of the **school-based curriculum** in special schools

- the **integration** of **individual priorities for learning** in subject teaching

- the key points and processes of **curriculum adaptation and differentiation**

- the need for **flexibility in implementing curriculum and curriculum policy**

1.5 Balanced Development – Continuous Enhancement

Special schools in Hong Kong, like ordinary schools, should be committed to providing balanced development for their students. This will entail working within a set of five key principles (see Figure 1.1) for developing a school-based curriculum.

Balanced Development

Schools should adopt a more balanced approach to students' moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development (which also includes psychological and emotional health). In the context of curriculum design and development, special schools should generate and maintain balance between the five essential learning experiences, the Key Learning Areas, generic skills, values and attitudes and other priorities in the school-based curriculum, including the well-being of students and the quality of their lives beyond school.

Participation and Improvement

Schools should be committed to promoting participation and improvement for all students in the processes of learning, teaching and assessment. Staff in special schools should therefore seek to develop students' capacity to express preferences, to make choices, to learn independently and to become self-directed learners.

Personalisation

To cater for each student's individual and personal needs, special schools should strengthen whole-school planning so that learning, teaching and assessment can recognise and respond to the full range of students' strengths and difficulties (e.g. in relation to learning, social and emotional or physical aspects).

Progression & Continuity

Schools should facilitate the interface between various stages and phases of learning. This will require staff in special schools to establish and maintain a key focus on progression and continuity in the curriculum, strengthening processes of curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review in order to provide feedback on curriculum planning and implementation.

Curriculum Leadership

Policy and practice in schools should strengthen teachers' professional capabilities and build effective learning communities. In this connection, special schools should strengthen curriculum leadership among school leaders and teachers and enhance assessment literacy in order to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

Figure 1.1 Key Principles of Developing the Whole-school Curriculum in Special Schools

Underpinning all these principles is the understanding that school improvement and curriculum development are processes of continual renewal and enhancement. In order to work effectively within the key principles, special schools should be committed to driving the processes of ongoing curriculum development and the improvement of learning and teaching to enhance the effectiveness of schools. By so doing, students' potential will be fully realised without being bound by their learning barriers and difficulties, and their well-being and quality of life will be enhanced.

Chapter 2

Curriculum Planning in Special Schools

Contents

Chapter 2
Curriculum Planning in Special Schools

Page

This is one of the 7 chapters in the *Curriculum Guide for Special Schools*.
Its contents are as follows:

2

Curriculum Planning in Special Schools

2.1 One Curriculum Framework for All

Special school may face significant challenges in implementing a curriculum that meaningfully includes students with a range of special educational needs and/or severe or multiple disabilities. There may be a sense of curriculum overload, uncertainty about what to teach, and questions about whether teaching should focus on curriculum subjects and/ or individual priorities.

This guide directly addresses these challenges by:

- acknowledging the **importance** of the **school-based curriculum in special schools**
- exemplifying the **integration of individual priorities within subject teaching**
- illustrating the main points and processes of **curriculum adaptation and differentiation**
- demonstrating **flexibility in designing and organising the curriculum**

On the principle of "one curriculum framework for all", special schools provide an entitlement for all students with the full range of learning experiences covering the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes among the Key Learning Areas (KLAs)/subjects and important aspects of the curriculum. Based on this principle, schools can develop their own plans to reflect balance and coherence in the school-based curriculum within the open and flexible central curriculum framework. This means that special schools, for example, can continue to focus on whole-person development for their students where issues such as daily living skills, social skills, problem solving skills or entry-level skills for work are regarded as priorities for learning.

The central curriculum provides a set of guiding principles on the overall aims of the school curriculum, seven learning goals, five essential learning experiences, and the curriculum frameworks – instead of providing fixed or prescribed content. All schools, including special schools, should place the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of the KLAs/subjects and important aspects of the central curriculum at the core of their curriculum planning in order to promote access for all students to diversified learning experiences. On the other hand, all schools should adapt and differentiate the central curriculum in developing their school-based curriculum in order to cater for the diverse needs of students by:

2

- re-adjusting learning targets

- varying the organisation of content

- adding optional studies

- using a variety of strategies for learning, teaching and assessment

Special schools are advised to adapt the central curriculum by developing their own school-based practices and designing a curriculum that meets the needs of their students. This will mean adapting aims, content, organisational strategies and expected learning outcomes to ensure that subject-related learning is relevant to all students in special schools. The EDB has provided a series of curriculum guides, for example, the supplementary guides of different subjects for students with intellectual disability, to exemplify and illustrate how these processes can support the development of a relevant and accessible school-based curriculum. These resources will support teachers in generating innovative ideas about what the subjects of the curriculum mean for students working at different levels of attainment (including students working at the earliest levels). For some students, the experience of learning within a subject-oriented framework may provide a foundation for learning in other important areas of the school-based curriculum.

Schools can take a flexible approach to developing the curriculum as there is freedom to adapt and differentiate as appropriate. Teachers in special schools, for example, can select aspects or elements to teach from each KLA or subject, and then decide on how to teach those aspects: as subjects, as sets of modules, as short courses or project work, or as some combination of these.

In addition to these considerations of planning and interpretation, the implementation of the school curriculum will require thorough consideration about the use of pedagogy. Staff in special schools are required to continuously reflect and think more deeply about the individual learning needs of their students while planning for group and whole class teaching. These differentiated approaches will provide personalised learning for students in the context of shared activities. In some schools, this will mean moving away from individualised and separate teaching and gearing towards planning for learning in mixed groups. In other schools, this will mean refining the process of setting individual objectives for learning for groups of students with mixed levels of prior attainment. Group work and interaction between peers will be key characteristics of classroom teaching, which increasingly focus on promoting individual progress within shared learning opportunities.

2.2 The School and Community Context

The society is changing rapidly. In recent years, Hong Kong has undergone many changes socially and culturally, economically and in terms of environmental conservation. These changes have brought impacts and challenges to the sustained development of the school curriculum.

There have been enormous social and cultural shifts. People's lifestyles have changed as technology has advanced. Also, there are increasing concerns for students' health, welfare and well-being in modern society. Schools themselves are changing as student populations become more diverse, which is also true of parents' attitudes to learning and life beyond school.

From the perspective of economics, fluctuations in the global economy impact significantly upon Hong Kong. There is an ongoing decline in the demand for low-skilled workers in the society but there are more jobs requiring new skills in communication, interpersonal relationships and collaboration among employees. Technological advancement also means that the demands of work are changing and developing rapidly. On the other hand, many people are becoming more aware of the environmental and conservation concerns and would expect schools to play their part in preparing students to address these issues directly in their future lives.

Clearly the school curriculum itself must change and develop in order to enable students to respond to these global and societal changes. Schools will have a responsibility to ensure that the aspirations, aims and objectives they have for their students keep pace with wider developments.

For reflection and action

● What kind of specific learning elements has your school incorporated into the school-based curriculum in response to social changes to ensure that student learning is keeping up with the times?

2

2.3 Establishing Aims for the School Curriculum

The "Learning to Learn" curriculum reform in 2001 established the **broad aims of education for the 21st century**[1], entailing fostering students' **whole-person development, positive values and attitudes, and learning to learn capabilities** to achieve lifelong learning. All students, whether or not they require special educational provision, have basically the same needs and should not be arbitrarily distinguished from one another on the basis of perceived categories of need. Therefore, the aims of the curriculum in special schools should be, in principle, the same as those for students in ordinary schools in that great emphasis should be put upon realising students' potential to the fullest. To support practical curriculum planning, these general aims may be broken down into more specific aims that might vary according to the learning needs of different groups of students and the schools they attend.

The rate at which these aims are reached will vary according to the learning needs and prior attainments of individual students and the means to achieve these aims may be different in special schools compared with ordinary schools. However, all students should be exposed to similar learning experiences, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes under the shared curriculum framework, as summarised in Figure 2.1, a diagram of the Hong Kong school curriculum.

[1] For details, please refer to the *Reform Proposals for the Education System in Hong Kong* (2000) and *Learning to Learn – The Way Forward in Curriculum Development* (2001).

Figure 2.1 Learning to Learn 2+ — The Hong Kong School Curriculum

Learning to Learn 2+ — The Hong Kong School Curriculum

A broad and balanced curriculum with diversification and specialisations (choices) for academic, professional and vocational development according to students' needs

Nurturing lifelong & self-directed learning capabilities

Multiple pathways

Fostering whole-person development

Life-wide Learning

SEVEN LEARNING GOALS

FIVE ESSENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Values Education · Intellectual Development · Community Service · Physical and Aesthetic Development · Career-related Experiences

Core Subjects	Elective Subjects	Other Learning Experiences
Chinese Language English Language Mathematics Citizenship and Social Development	Elective Subjects under Key Learning Areas Applied Learning Other Languages	Values Education · Community Service Aesthetic Development · Career-related Experiences Physical Development

Major Renewed Emphases of Primary and Secondary School Curricula

Chinese Language Education — Key Learning Area

English Language Education — Key Learning Area

Mathematics Education — Key Learning Area

Science Education — Key Learning Area

Technology Education — Key Learning Area

Personal, Social & Humanities Education — Key Learning Area

Arts Education — Key Learning Area

Physical Education — Key Learning Area

Values & attitudes, Skills and Knowledge

Language · Early Childhood Mathematics · Nature & Living · Self & Society · Arts & Creativity · Physical Fitness & Health

Secondary 4-6 · SS
Secondary 1-3 · JS
Primary 1-6 · P
Kindergarten 1-3 · KG

Values & attitudes
Twelve priority values
- Perseverance
- Respect for Others
- Responsibility
- National Identity
- Commitment
- Integrity
- Benevolence
- Law-abidingness
- Empathy
- Diligence
- Filial Piety
- Unity

Generic skills

Basic Skills
- Communication Skills
- Mathematical Skills
- IT Skills

Thinking Skills
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Creativity
- Problem Solving Skills

Personal & Social Skills
- Self-management Skills
- Self-learning Skills
- Collaboration Skills

教育局 Education Bureau 2024

Remarks:

1. The major renewed emphases of primary and secondary school curricula cover: values education, good use of learning time, STEAM education and media and information literacy (MIL), etc.

2. There are currently twelve priority values and attitudes[2], with the introduction of "Law-abidingness" and "Empathy" in 2020, "Diligence" in 2021, and "Filial Piety" and "Unity" as well as the extension of "Care for Others" to "Benevolence" in 2023.

3. Primary Humanities and Primary Science will be implemented, in lieu of General Studies, at Primary 1 and Primary 4 starting from the 2025/26 school year. For details please refer to:
   – Education Bureau Circular No. 18/2023 "Introduction of Primary Science and a Series of Related Support Measures"
   – Education Bureau Circular No. 20/2023 "Introduction of Primary Humanities"
   – Education Bureau Circular No. 9/2024 "Primary Humanities Curriculum Framework (Final Draft) and Support Measures"

4. Citizenship, Economics and Society Curriculum (Secondary 1-3) has been implemented, in lieu of Life and Society Curriculum, starting from Secondary 1 in the 2024/25 school year.

5. Citizenship and Social Development has been implemented, in lieu of Liberal Studies, starting from Secondary 4 in the 2021/22 school year.

---

[2] The twelve priority values and attitudes include "Perseverance", "Respect for Others", "Responsibility", "National Identity", "Commitment", "Integrity", "Benevolence", "Law-abidingness", "Empathy", "Diligence", "Filial Piety" and "Unity".

2

The central curriculum framework is composed of three interconnected components: knowledge in Key Learning Areas (KLAs), generic skills, and values and attitudes. Taking these components together, special schools will be able to:

- meet the entitlement of students in special schools to access the same learning areas of knowledge and understanding as their age peers in ordinary schools

- provide progression in learning within an open curriculum framework by introducing new areas of knowledge and understanding as students mature

- secure continuity in the curriculum by ensuring that important skills, values and attitudes are developed consistently throughout each student's career in school

- provide relevance in the curriculum as learning is personalised to meet each student's priority needs

Under the ongoing renewal "Learning to Learn 2+" of the school curriculum, the aims of education in all schools should take into account a number of shared elements. These include the seven learning goals, the five essential learning experiences, and the major renewed emphases (MRE) of the curriculum in Hong Kong. Analysis of these elements indicates that the curriculum in all schools should provide experience of and progress in:

- values education (including Constitution and Basic Law education, life education, national and national security education, etc.)

- intellectual development (including breadth of knowledge)

- social development (including community service and social skills, etc.)

- physical and aesthetic development (connecting with the learning goal related to "healthy lifestyle")

- career-related experiences connecting with life planning education for lifelong learning

- STEAM education

- media and information literacy, information technology for learning and self-directed learning

- reading across the curriculum, literacy, language proficiency and communication

- life-wide learning, project learning and integrating and applying knowledge and skills across disciplines

- generic skills and whole-person development

These areas of learning will be common to all schools and will find expression in every school curriculum. However, in drawing upon these common areas of learning, the **general aims of the curriculum in special schools** are likely to emphasise:

- enabling students to achieve **personal development** according to their individual differences

- addressing the **well-being and quality of life** of the students during their school years and as a core element of life planning

- preparing students for **living and functioning** in their homes, the neighbourhood and the wider community

- developing in the students study skills, a positive attitude to learning and good study habits to support **self-directed learning** and for further studies and development

- developing in the students work skills, a positive attitude to work and good work habits to support **vocational training** and for work

- enabling the students to achieve as much **independence** as possible and become contributing members of the community
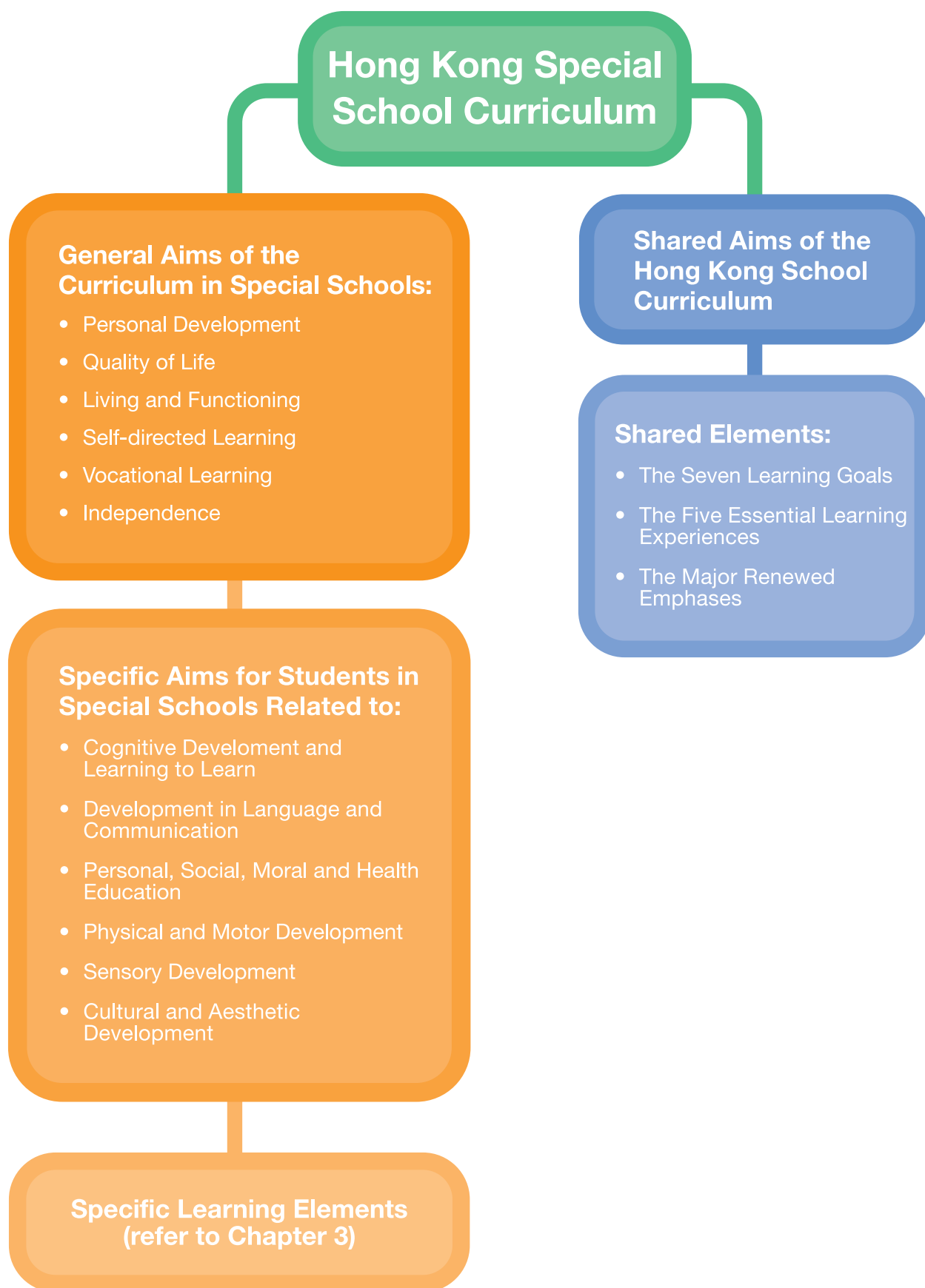
These ideas are further elaborated in Chapter 3 "Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum". However, special schools are also required to address and overcome the difficulties in learning that occur as a result of students' special educational needs or disabilities. In order to ensure that students have opportunities to learn in all domains, special schools may therefore wish to develop further **specific aims** for their students in areas of learning that include:

- aims related to **cognitive development and learning to learn** – for example, for students who have intellectual disability or who require direct support with the fundamental processes of learning

- aims related to **development in language and communication** – for example, for some individual students with autism spectrum disorder or sensory impairments who need to use augmented forms of communication

- aims related to **personal, social, moral and health education** – for example, where students have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties that threaten to interfere with their learning and their integration into society

- aims related to **physical and motor development** – for example, for students with physical disabilities who require therapeutic interventions in order to maintain good health, posture and mobility

- aims related to **sensory development** – for example, for students with sensory impairments and complex needs who need to maximise their fluency in using available sensory modalities

- aims related to **cultural and aesthetic development** – for example, for students who have joined special schools in Hong Kong from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds

2

These specific aims will enable special schools to provide a curriculum that addresses direct relevance to the priority needs, well-being and future quality of life of students with a wide spectrum of difficulties in learning.

Therefore, special schools are required to develop a school-based curriculum which is aligned with the central curriculum, including the seven learning goals, the five essential learning experiences, and the major renewed emphases (MRE). They will also need to develop sets of specific aims and related learning elements that set out to address the special educational needs of their students (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Hong Kong Special School Curriculum

Hong Kong Special School Curriculum

General Aims of the Curriculum in Special Schools:

- Personal Development
- Quality of Life
- Living and Functioning
- Self-directed Learning
- Vocational Learning
- Independence

Shared Aims of the Hong Kong School Curriculum

Shared Elements:

- The Seven Learning Goals
- The Five Essential Learning Experiences
- The Major Renewed Emphases

Specific Aims for Students in Special Schools Related to:

- Cognitive Develoment and Learning to Learn
- Development in Language and Communication
- Personal, Social, Moral and Health Education
- Physical and Motor Development
- Sensory Development
- Cultural and Aesthetic Development

Specific Learning Elements (refer to Chapter 3)

2

In order to address these broad aims, special schools will then need to provide students with clear objectives for learning. These objectives are elaborated in the following section.

2.4 Setting Objectives for Learning

In planning a curriculum for students, learning and teaching in special schools should provide:

● **breadth of experience** – an entitlement to study within "one curriculum framework for all", including for those students who may not make rapid or sustained progress towards subject-related attainments

● **relevance to individual needs** – enabling staff, parents and students to identify and pursue priorities for learning for each student, whether these relate to subject content or not

● **an integrated approach** – in which personalised priorities for learning are addressed in the context of experiences founded in the "one curriculum framework for all"

Therefore, staff working with students in special schools may need to establish different kinds of learning objectives. For example, staff will need to set subject-related objectives that derive from the subjects and other aspects of the shared curriculum; staff will also wish to establish objectives focused on **generic skills** that are designed to be taught to all students in the context of subjects, therefore providing an approach in which generic skills are integrated into subject teaching; there will also be a need for staff to target objectives focusing on the generic skills that can be used to promote learning across the curriculum for individual students based on their specific personalised priorities.

Generic skills, as part of the curriculum framework, include:

- a set of basic skills:
  - Communication Skills
  - Mathematical Skills
  - Information Technology Skills

- a set of thinking skills:
  - Critical Thinking Skills
  - Creativity
  - Problem Solving Skills

- a set of personal and social skills:
  - Self-management Skills
  - Self-learning Skills
  - Collaboration Skills

Staff in special schools may establish shared and individual priorities for learning for students according to these categories of generic skills (which will be illustrated in Chapter 3 "Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum"). Staff in special schools may also make use of **other categories of essential skills** in order to set targets for individual students, for example, in terms of:

- fine and gross motor skills

- perceptual skills

- mobility skills

Special school staff may set objectives in these further categories in response to the individual needs of their own students so that important areas of perceptual motor training are implemented in the context of subject teaching. Special schools should regard integrating personal targets for individual students within subject lessons as an important aspect of practice for their students in schools.

To cater for the developmental needs of students and prepare them for the transition into life beyond school, teachers in special schools will need to negotiate, with students and parents as well as other professionals, the shared and individual objectives that relate to **life planning education** (which will be illustrated in Chapter 3 "Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum"). These areas of learning include:

- self-understanding and development– for example, understanding one's values, interests, needs, strengths and limitations for personal growth

- career and life exploration – for example, knowledge of the world of work, employment skills and work ethics, preferred activities

- career and life pathway planning and management – for example, goal setting and decision making, developing independent living skills and interpersonal skills

2

For reflection and action

- What outcomes do students in your school achieve in relation to generic skills? How could your school expand the range of possible outcomes available to students under these headings?

- In what ways do teachers in your school support the development of students' generic skills while also teaching subject-related knowledge, skills and attitudes?

- What strategies do you use to inform students of their own learning targets and progress?

In practice, **the balance between the kinds of objectives** outlined in this chapter **will be different for different students.** Some students may make balanced progress in both subject learning and generic skills development and need not require a focus on specific generic skills as personalised learning. Some individual students may require a significant emphasis on generic skills (in terms of communication and behavioural self-management, for example) and be ready for subject learning initially at very early levels.

It follows that some students in special schools will predominantly make progress in generic skills rather than gain new knowledge of a subject in a subject-related activity. Though the subject may provide a context in which the development of generic skills takes place, teachers should always aim also to secure subject-related learning for those students in the teaching group for whom subject-related learning is relevant and accessible.

In special schools, **subject-related objectives** should be set according to the learning objectives of the curriculum of KLAs/subjects rather than assessment materials. For example, the descriptions of outcomes in the Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs) may usefully be used to reveal students' core attainments and progress in the subjects and support more accurate assessment, but it is inappropriate to use these assessment items in order to create targets or objectives for learning (see Chapter 5 "Assessing Progress and Attainment" for more details of assessment).

The task of setting objectives can be a collaborative effort of teachers and professionals. For example, teachers and therapists may work together when setting objectives relating to generic skills (e.g. communication skills) and other essential skills (e.g. mobility or

attention control), whether these are designed to be implemented for groups of students or for individual students. Working in this way can help to develop an integrated approach to subject teaching that can provide:

- breadth of experience as an entitlement for all students

- relevance to individual needs for students when their personal priorities for learning are addressed in the context of subject lessons

For more details of collaboration between staff working in different roles, please refer to Chapter 4, Section 4.5 "Team Work in the Classroom".

2.5 Planning Learning and Teaching Activities in the Curriculum in Special Schools

Plans for implementation of the curriculum in special schools can be developed in three phases:

- in the long term – planning the curriculum across year groups, key stages and age phases of education

- in the medium term – developing units of work to be taught in specific terms or semesters

- in the short term – planning for lessons in the days/weeks ahead

Curriculum Planning in the Long Term

Long term planning enables schools to set out their broad aims and plans with regard to the content of the curriculum in different subjects, establishing decisions about what to cover regarding the learning elements, knowledge, skills and values and attitudes, securing continuity and progression in learning for students in different key stages or year groups and making effective connections between areas of content in different subjects. These plans help teachers locate the teaching of different aspects and content of the subjects of the curriculum in different year groups or key stages; promote learning experiences that are age-appropriate; and help to ensure that the curriculum for students of different key stages or year groups is appropriately balanced.

Long term planning can also help teachers control repetition in the curriculum while planning to address the priority needs of students in special schools as required. Long term curriculum plans enable schools to identify "gaps" or missing strands in the curriculum and to develop ways to overcome these shortcomings. Planning the curriculum collaboratively can help to build consistent approaches to essential teaching across the whole school and that core expertise and good practices in teaching are shared and disseminated among staff (whether they are subject specialists or not). A good long term plan can therefore provide guidance on what topics/content to teach and when to teach them for all members of staff.

2

Planning for Progression

Teachers in special schools should plan for progression as a key aspect of long term planning. Planning for progression in the curriculum can allow teachers to think carefully how they intend to manage sequences of learning that build over time (for example, from year group to year group or from key stage to key stage). It also enables teachers to manage the interfaces between key stages, both for the subjects that are taught in all key stages (e.g. Mathematics) and the subjects that are specific to defined key stages (e.g. Citizenship and Social Development).

One familiar aspect of progression involves planning ways in which students will gain new or extended knowledge and skills as they grow older. Planning for progression in terms of these increments is of course important, ensuring that aspects of the curriculum are distributed across subject plans in logical sequences. Planning for progression in special schools, however, should go beyond the allocation of more difficult material into plans for teaching older students. Teachers should take full account of the assessed levels of attainment among their students, and plan for progression in the curriculum in various ways (see Figure 2.3 for examples of some of these possibilities). In fact, some students in special schools may need extended opportunities to rehearse and consolidate emerging skills over long periods of their education.

Figure 2.3 Planning for Progression

Special schools may plan for progression in the curriculum in terms of:

- **Skills development** – planning to enable students to gain new skills where possible but also to practise, refine, maintain and generalise their use of pre-existing skills

- **Entitlement to breadth of curricular content** – planning to enable students to engage with new kinds of stimulating and age-appropriate experiences as they move through different key stages

- **Contexts for learning** – providing opportunities for students to take their learning into a range of new contexts as they grow older, for example, spending less time in class and more time applying their learning in real life situations

- **Variety of support equipment** – working towards a reduction in the need for students to rely on supportive resources such as equipment and tools

- **Range of teaching methods** – enabling students to become familiar, comfortable and confident with different styles of learning and teaching, for example, from one-to-one teaching through to independent group work

- **Negotiated learning** – enabling students increasingly to take greater control over their own learning, setting targets for themselves, choosing how to work and reviewing their own learning

- **Application of knowledge and skills in new settings** – encouraging students to use their learning under different circumstances, for example, from familiar classroom routines, through activities that simulate real life scenarios in school, towards activity in a range of environments out in the community

- **Implementing strategies for independent learning** – enabling students to work with less supervision and prompting as they become more confident and self-reliant

All these forms of progression can be built into long term plans for student learning in special schools, so that the curriculum can provide new opportunities and experiences for all students, including those for whom gaining new skills and knowledge remains challenging and those whose circumstances may cause them to reach a plateau of attainment or lose skills over time.

Continuing Skills and Other Aspects of Learning Related to Specific Aims

In addition to providing a progressive curriculum, there is a need in special schools to teach some aspects of the curriculum on an ongoing basis, providing frequent and regular opportunities for students to develop and reinforce their learning consistently year after year. These opportunities can be indicated on long term curriculum plans for continuing skills development, for example, showing that students will develop and apply language and communication skills constantly in all lessons or that literacy skills and numeracy skills are practised on a daily basis.

Students in some special schools will also benefit from ongoing opportunities to enhance their physical and mobility capabilities, their sensory and perceptual skills or their social and behavioural responses. These are aspects of the curriculum that relate directly to the learning needs of students in special schools and to the specific aims that are discussed earlier in this chapter. These are likely to be regarded as essential or priority areas of learning for students in special schools.

2

A Balanced Approach

Curriculum planning in special schools can help teachers manage the relationships between the subjects of the central curriculum and other aspects of the school-based curriculum. Long term plans can be used to adjust the balance between these elements in the curriculum:

- for students in each age group/key stage
- for groups of students with different prior attainments
- for groups of students with different learning needs

➢ **For Students in Different Key Stages**

Some special schools may emphasise the teaching of self-care skills to younger students and therefore will allocate more time to these areas of learning in the first years of primary schooling in Key Stage 1. In the secondary phase, teachers may introduce new topics for learning for students, for example, teaching skills and knowledge for independent living in the community, personal and social skills or entry-level skills for work starting from Key Stage 3; providing older students with opportunities to choose and study elective subjects across different KLAs according to their abilities and interests in Key Stage 4.

➢ **For Groups of Students with Different Prior Attainments**

Teachers of special schools can use long term plans to allocate subject content from the central curriculum across the year groups or key stages according to the prior attainment of students. For example, teachers may make decisions about the progressive and/or differentiated learning objectives in the Chinese Language curriculum for students with different prior attainments in junior secondary as opposed to senior secondary level, or about the objectives and content in project work in General Studies[3] across the year groups P4 to P6 at senior primary level. These planning processes may involve teachers agreeing to teach some aspects of the subjects in depth, some in outline and some not at all for students in different year groups or key stages.

Long term planning allows special schools to develop an overview of the school curriculum in the form of a grid or matrix (usually referred to as a "curriculum map") showing how

---

[3] The 2023 Policy Address delivered by the Chief Executive announced the introduction of Primary Humanities and Primary Science which will be implemented progressively starting from the 2025/26 school year. For details, please refer to Chapter 1 of the PECG (2024) and the EDB webpages related to Humanities, Science Education and Special Educational Needs.

curriculum content and aspects of specific subjects are taught in different year groups or key stages. This kind of planning overview can show how some aspects are taught as subject-specific units or modules of work (for example, a block of work lasting one term in Chinese Language lessons to learn a topic with ancient poetry and modern texts in S4) while other aspects are taught as project work, creating opportunities to explore links between subjects (for example, a project "Heat Transfer" in junior secondary Science Education addressing the heat transfer processes, e.g. conduction and convection, linked with data handling in Mathematics and principles of heat transference in cooking in the curriculum of Technology and Living).

➢ **Managing Links Between Subjects**

Experience in schools demonstrates that teaching subjects in combinations, making the most of natural links between different subjects and areas of learning, can be very effective under certain circumstances. As mentioned in Section 2.4 "Setting Objectives for Learning", opportunities to practise generic skills can be integrated into subject-oriented learning activities. For example, teachers may plan to:

● encourage students to develop their skills in listening to options and communicating choices, through spoken language and/or non-verbal means (such as signs, gestures and communication aids), in Mathematics lessons as well as in lessons in Chinese Language

● encourage students to use multimedia means (e.g. photos, audio and video) and mobile devices to present findings in STEAM-related learning activities in General Studies/ Science lessons as well as projects in other subjects

● make use of regular opportunities for counting and highlighting arithmetical skills in lessons in other subjects such as Physical Education as well as in Mathematics classes

● use information and communication technologies (e.g. switch control or touch screens) to support active involvement in creativity activities in Music lessons for students with physical disabilities

Myth: Is it better to link more subjects than less when adopting cross-curricular/interdisciplinary learning (e.g. project learning)?

Under certain circumstances, schools can provide opportunities for some aspects of the content of different subjects to be taught in combination, for example, through cross-curricular/interdisciplinary learning (including project learning), to help students make connections between the related concepts, knowledge and learning experiences as well as learn to view a problem from different perspectives. However, it does not mean that the more subjects to be connected, the more effective the learning will be. More importantly, it will work best when

2

making natural and meaningful connections and combinations between the most closely related content in few subjects (it can be two or three) for students' more complete understanding of the topic. Managing links between subjects in this way enables teachers to identify and focus clearly on the objectives and areas of content for learning. By so doing, teachers will be able to design appropriate learning activities to help students achieve the objectives and therefore to recognise subject-related attainments when they occur.

Curriculum Planning in the Medium Term

Medium term planning enables teachers in special schools to develop the broad outlines for teaching developed during long term planning into greater detail of learning and teaching design, which will entail working out plans for sequences of lessons that might be taught (for example, in units across a term within a school year). As such, the long term plan provides a broad guide for teachers about what to teach in a particular time frame, and the medium term plans enable teachers to think over a further set of questions for a series of related lessons in a term or a unit of work, for example:

- What do we want students to learn? What are the expected learning outcomes?

- How should the content/material be taught so that students meet these objectives? What will students actually do in these lessons?

- What attainments in learning are possible and how will they be recognised? How will we know when students have made progress?

The adoption of appropriate planning formats or templates can cross-reference medium term planning to long term plans of the subjects of the curriculum. In medium term planning, teachers can make use of these planning formats to plan the resources and classroom management strategies needed to support learning through each term or unit of work, as well as to plan for differentiation according to their students' abilities, interests and needs. For example, these planning formats can be provided to plan:

- **differentiated objectives for learning**

- **differentiated activities, experiences and classroom organisation**

- **differentiated assessment opportunities**

Differentiation

Differentiation is the process by which teaching is adapted in medium term plans and personalised in short term plans so that all the students in a session are engaged in challenging and meaningful learning. There are many ways to provide differentiation and some examples are indicated in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 Planning for Differentiation

Teachers in special schools may plan for differentiation in the curriculum in terms of:

- **Content** – planning teaching so that students work on various aspects of the same subject matter

- **Interest** – offering activities that reflect students' individual or shared interests and experiences

- **Pace** – allowing students to work through material at varying speeds and that work is presented at varying rates

- **Sequence** – enabling students to dip into material in varying orders – whether this is planned by teachers or whether students are encouraged to self-select a sequence for their learning as part of a negotiated approach

- **Level** – planning stratified lessons so that students work on similar concepts at different levels, reflecting their previous attainments

- **Access** – presenting material to students through varying modes depending on their prior skills and learning preferences – for example, aural, visual, tactile, concrete, linguistic or using technologies or symbols

- **Response** – enabling students to respond to similar activities in varying ways which may be planned (i.e. the teacher deliberately designs and requests varied outcomes) or spontaneous (i.e. students are encouraged to make different responses according to their opinions or preferences)

- **Structure** – presenting work in small, developmentally sequenced steps or in conceptually related chunks; developing teaching that is subject specific or integrated

- **Teacher time** – planning to provide some one-to-one time with staff; allowing time for students to develop and communicate their own responses; or providing time for additional support from other staff members or volunteers

- **Teaching style** – planning to deploy a range of teaching approaches, for example, didactic, investigative or discursive work, across a teaching unit or within one lesson

- **Learning style** – encouraging students to make use of a range of strategies for learning, for example, listening, exploring or problem solving, across a teaching unit or within one class

- **Grouping** – providing opportunities, in different learning contexts and for different purposes, for students to work as individuals, in pairs, in small groups, as a whole class and at times in whole school settings

Differentiated learning objectives can enable teachers to provide appropriate learning challenges in every series of lessons or teaching unit for students who work at different levels. Differentiated activities can promote that all students are actively involved in classes and that there are, for example, practical, experiential or sensory dimensions to the lessons as well as more cognitively challenging learning experiences to extend the learning of students reaching higher attainments (for the deployment of learning and teaching strategies, please see Chapter 4 "Developing Effective Approaches to Learning and Teaching"). Differentiated assessment opportunities will help teachers prepare to recognise and record outcomes at a range of levels and to relate these attainments to subject-related assessment frameworks where appropriate (see Chapter 5 "Assessing Progress and Attainment").

Differentiation can help teachers teach groups of students with different needs, with different prior attainments and of different ages within the same class. For special schools whose students are often highly diverse in terms of these aspects, planning for differentiation can help reduce the complexities in classroom management that teachers face every day.

It is important to note here that the planning formats mentioned above are not meant to be definitive or prescriptive. Each school should take the principles outlined in this guide and use them in order to devise different formats that are appropriate for circumstances specific to that school and the needs of students. Staff in special schools should also develop curriculum plans in teams (e.g. a subject panel team), collaboratively and in discussion, so that ideas and expertise can be pooled together. Long and medium term planning are shared tasks and should not become the responsibility of individual teachers. Schools' curriculum planning is always enhanced by sharing and collaboration (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5 "Team Work in the Classroom").

Myth: As students are extremely diverse in abilities and needs in special schools, their learning readiness and progress may vary according to the changes of their physical conditions. Does planning in the long and medium term really work meaningfully for these students?

Planning for progressive and systematic learning are often required and beneficial to students, irrespective of their abilities and learning needs. Planning in the long term, for example, formulating and organising the learning content and the progression in the curriculum for each key stage, can enhance the interface and balance between different key stages, ensuring continuity and progression in learning which is also age-appropriate for students.

Planning in the medium term, for example, developing plans for sequences of lessons in a term or a unit, can enable teachers to use differentiation when setting objectives, learning activities and assessments to promote student participation and attainment with a view to addressing their diversity in abilities and needs. In addition, teachers will be able to reflect on the teaching effectiveness from their teaching practices and students' responses/performance, so as to adjust their teaching to facilitate student learning and to enhance the effectiveness of future planning and teaching.

Developing long and medium term plans takes time and is challenging sometimes. However, it will provide efficient return on effort expended since the plans can be used many times with different cohorts of students. Special schools should therefore plan learning objectives and schemes of work in the long and medium term for notional groups of students in defined key stages or year groups, so that adjustments can be made for actual groups of specific students according to their needs and abilities. In sum, long and medium term planning is indispensable for facilitating learning and teaching as it provides progressive and continuous learning for students while catering for their abilities and needs as well as offers teachers a good opportunity for reflection on their teaching.

Curriculum Planning in the Short Term

Before developing short term plans for lessons, special schools are recommended carrying out strategic long and medium term curriculum planning, including the task of differentiation, so as to reduce the need for detailed short term planning and in turn the burden on subject teachers for individual classes.

Long and medium term plans can provide powerful guidance for well-differentiated teaching. However, teachers will need to be ready to respond to the immediate needs of particular

2

students in classrooms and lessons day by day. Differentiating curriculum plans into further detail for specific groups of students on a lesson by lesson, week by week or daily basis is a key task in short term planning. In the short term, teachers will need to:

- integrate short term priorities or targets of learning for individual students into lesson plans

- make plans for deploying available resources in terms of equipment and staff

- prepare to record students' responses and to make assessments, both in relation to curriculum objectives and individual priorities for learning

Establishing personalised priorities or targets for individual learning, as suggested in Section 2.4 "Setting Objectives for Learning" in this chapter, can help ensure the relevance of learning in class to the needs of individual students. These priorities for learning (such as communication, independence or self-management of behaviour) can be practised in a wide range of contexts, including subject-oriented lessons. Provided that there are regular reviews of progress, continuity and consistency in learning in these key areas for individual students can be ensured. Furthermore, schools should make good use of learning time[4], including lesson time, the time outside class at school and the time spent outside school, to help students extend their learning in these priority areas beyond lessons (e.g. at home and in the community), as well as enhance the partnerships with students, parents and other professionals (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5 "Team Work in the Classroom").
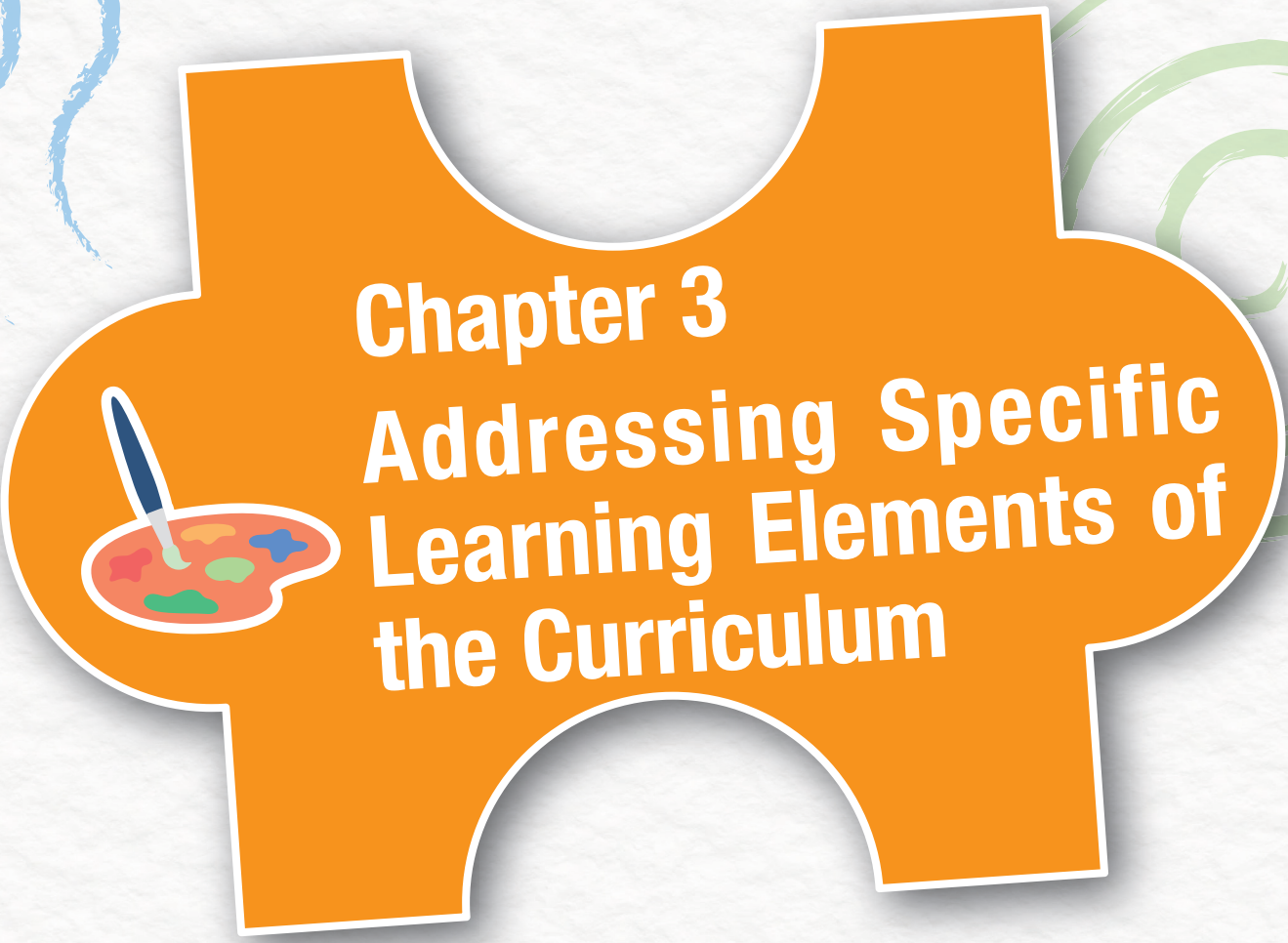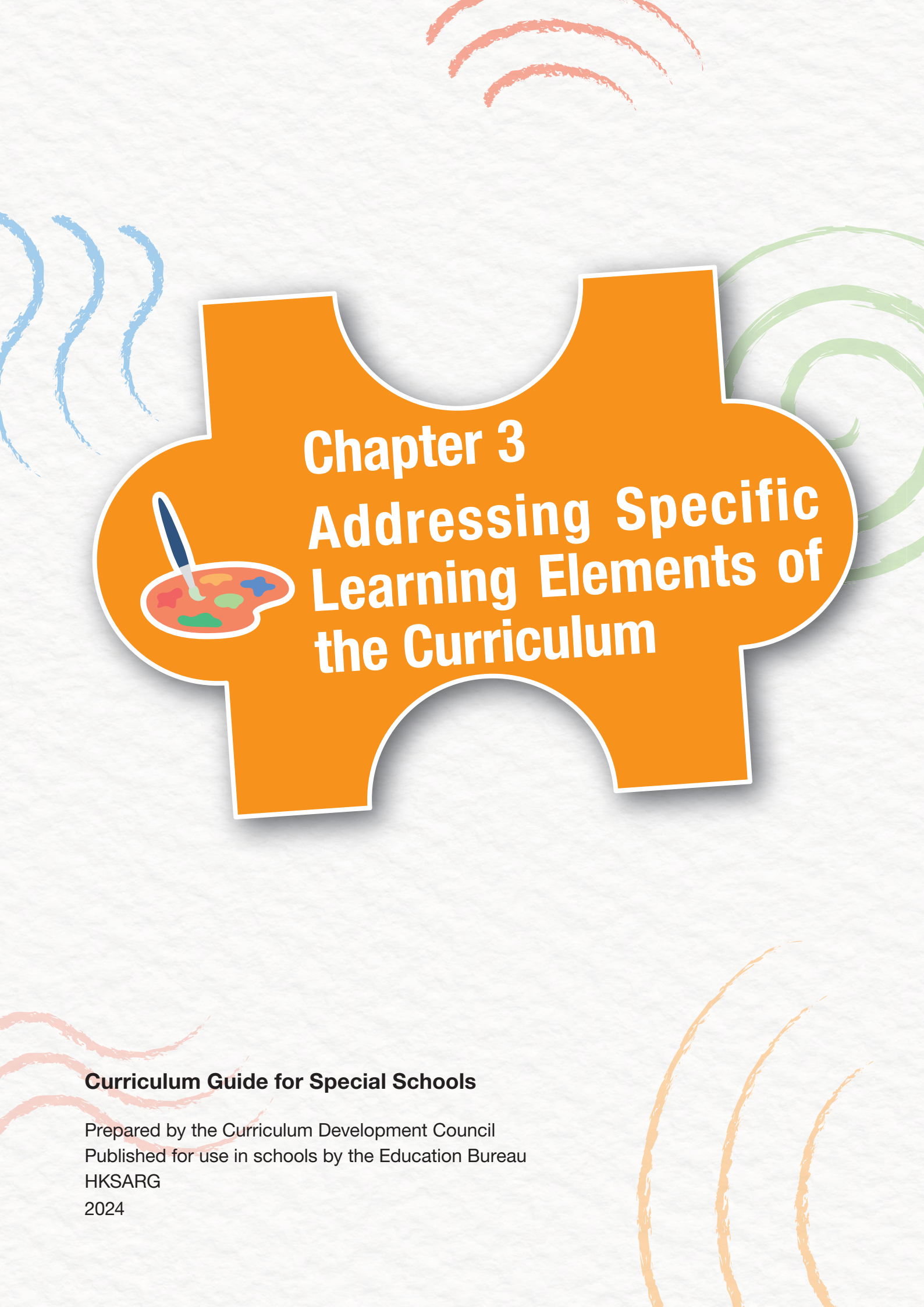
Planning is essential to effective teaching, but staff in special schools still need to be flexible and spontaneous in their interactions with students and in their responses to student reactions and behaviours during lessons, with a view to making learning stimulating, exciting and fun for students. For the approaches to facilitating student learning, please refer to Chapter 4 "Developing Effective Approaches to Learning and Teaching".

---

[4] For further details of the notion of "learning time", please refer to the *Task Force on Review of School Curriculum Final Report* (2020) and the PECG (2024).

For reflection and action

- Who participates in whole-school curriculum planning in your school? How could your school extend participation in these processes?

- Are there differences in your school between the planned curriculum and the implemented curriculum? Why do these differences occur and what action could be taken in your school to bridge the gap between planning and implementation?

- What processes do you follow in your school that are similar to or equivalent to long, medium and short term planning? How could these processes be streamlined and improved to make them more efficient and effective?

Chapter 3

Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

Contents

Chapter 3
Addressing Specific Learning
Elements of the Curriculum

Page

This is one of the 7 chapters in the *Curriculum Guide for Special Schools.*
Its contents are as follows:

3

Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum

3.1 The Central Curriculum as a Framework for School-based Curriculum Development

Under the principle of "one curriculum framework for all", all schools can develop a broad and balanced school-based curriculum in accordance with the open and flexible central curriculum framework. As noted in Chapter 2 "Curriculum Planning in Special Schools", schools should provide students with the following **five essential learning experiences** in their curriculum for whole-person development:

- Values Education
- Intellectual Development
- Community Service
- Physical and Aesthetic Development
- Career-related Experiences

As shown in Figure 2.1 "Learning to Learn 2+ — The Hong Kong School Curriculum" in Chapter 2, the framework of the central curriculum comprises three interconnected components: knowledge of **Key Learning Areas** (KLAs), generic skills and values and attitudes. The eight KLAs include:

- Chinese Language Education
- English Language Education
- Mathematics Education
- Science Education
- Technology Education
- Personal, Social and Humanities Education
- Arts Education
- Physical Education

Generic skills are the fundamental skills that help students acquire, construct and apply knowledge in various contexts. They are relevant to students of all ages and across the full range of aptitudes and special educational needs or disabilities. Students can develop generic skills through learning and teaching in a range of learning contexts and transfer these skills from one learning situation to another. The nine generic skills are:

- Communication Skills
- Mathematical Skills
- Information Technology Skills
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Creativity
- Problem Solving Skills
- Self-management Skills
- Self-learning Skills
- Collaboration Skills

Values and attitudes may be defined as qualities that an individual or society considers important as principles for conduct and are intrinsically worthwhile. The twelve priority values and attitudes include:

- Perseverance
- Respect for Others
- Responsibility
- National Identity
- Commitment
- Integrity
- Benevolence
- Law-abidingness
- Empathy
- Diligence
- Unity
- Filial Piety

3

This central curriculum framework is designed to be inclusive. It is a framework that should be used as a starting point for developing the curriculum in all schools in Hong Kong, ordinary and special. In that sense, all students, including those with and without special educational needs, have an entitlement to study within the framework of the central curriculum. As noted in Chapter 2 "Curriculum Planning in Special Schools", the central curriculum framework is designed to be used flexibly in order to meet the needs of students.

Staff in special schools should look at the curriculum guides, the PECG (2024) and the SECG (2017), and related documents[5] in order to become familiar with the guidance and recommendations on curriculum development given by the EDB to all schools as they plan their curricula. These guides give up-to-date information about the subjects and other aspects taught in different key stages and year groups and provide a sound basis for curriculum development in special schools. Staff in special schools can then decide, based upon their knowledge and awareness of the structures of the central curriculum and in view of the needs, interests and attainments of their students, whether to adopt:

- the curriculum as delivered in ordinary schools

- a curriculum that has been adapted for students with special educational needs (for example, intellectual disability)

- a combination of both, i.e. a curriculum that is delivered in ordinary schools for some students, and an adapted curriculum for other students

Whatever decisions staff in special schools make regarding the curriculum framework, it should be noted that the central curriculum does not provide fixed and prescribed contents for teaching. Schools should adapt and differentiate the subjects and other aspects of the curriculum and decide how to make use of and extend the flexibilities available to schools in developing a school-based curriculum that is tailored to the specific needs of their students. Some special schools may wish to build additional areas of learning into their school-based curriculum in order to meet the specific needs of their students.

School staff are encouraged to consider the opportunities that the generic skills offer (see Section 3.2 below) to embed the learning of priority skills into daily lessons as well as the option of devoting lesson time to additional curriculum elements.

---

[5] The *Task Force on Review of School Curriculum Final Report* and the *Supplementary Notes to the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide (2017)* were published in 2020 and 2021 respectively to provide further updates and recommendations for schools on holistic curriculum planning. For details of the latest updates in curriculum development, please refer to the EDB webpage on the Ongoing Renewal of the School Curriculum (www.edb.gov.hk/renewal).

The EDB has published curriculum guides for KLAs/subjects to provide reference points and advice for the development of the school-based curriculum. Specifically, the EDB has provided a series of supplementary guides supporting teachers in adapting and differentiating the subjects of the central curriculum for students with intellectual disability. Sections 3.2 and 3.3 will go on to examine the principles that inform the development of responses to specific learning elements in the curriculum.

> ### ⟳❓ For reflection and action
>
> ● Does your school adhere to the suggested percentages of time allocated to various subjects in the curriculum? If not, why?
>
> ● What procedures are adopted in your school to implement and validate the process of allocating lesson time to additional curriculum elements and making adjustments to time allocation?

3.2 Securing Continuity in the Curriculum Through Generic Skills, Values and Attitudes

Special schools can promote learning through subjects and timetabled sessions to build a strong sense of progression into the curriculum, taking into consideration the different needs and interests that students have as they grow older. **Generic skills, values and attitudes** and **other essential skills**, by contrast, are relevant to students of any age. They are designed to be **integrated into all aspects of learning and teaching for students in all key stages across the curriculum**, so as to help students of all age groups develop related skills as well as positive values and attitudes.

Generic Skills

As shown in the table below, the nine generic skills are grouped in three clusters, namely basic skills, thinking skills and personal and social skills. For details of each generic skill, please refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017). As mentioned in the Booklet, **integrative approach**[6] is recommended as each generic skill should not be seen in isolation, and meaningful contexts should be provided for the development of these skills.

---

[6] Refer to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), p.9.

3

Grouping of the nine generic skills:

Basic Skills	Thinking Skills	Personal and Social Skills
Communication Skills	Critical Thinking Skills	Self-management Skills
Mathematical Skills	Creativity	Self-learning Skills
Information Technology Skills	Problem Solving Skills	Collaboration Skills

In order to emphasise the applicability of the generic skills to all students, many special schools develop statements showing the range of possible accomplishments that the generic skills can cover for their students. Brief examples of the nine generic skills are provided in the following sub-sections.

Communication Skills[7]

Communication may be defined as a process whereby two or more people interact through expressing or receiving messages, information or ideas using verbal or non-verbal means. Some students in special schools, in light of their impairment in speech and language, cognitive and physical abilities, etc., would communicate through various means:

- non-symbolic means, including vocalisation, facial expressions and behaviours, from pre-intentional to intentional, and unconventional to conventional

- symbolic non-verbal means, including consistent facial expressions, physical responses, natural gestures, body language or sign language

- speaking and listening, from single word utterances to making speeches

- reading and writing, from recognition of logos and simple signage to reading books and writing passages

- augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems, including use of aids with compilation of methods and technologies to, for example, augment spoken language by speech generating devices, or to alternate speech by pictures/symbols/written words through communication devices

With the importance of communication for students with special educational needs and different possible means of communication, staff in special schools should implement these

---

[7] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), p.52.

skills training systematically and universally for students in different situations according to their abilities and needs. It will be helpful for students to be provided with opportunities to develop their communication skills in lessons and during other school activities of a school day, at home/boarding section and in the community. For the majority of students in special schools, development of communication skills forms a core part of personalised or individualised education programme.

Mathematical Skills[8]

Mathematical skills may be demonstrated when students apply mathematical concepts in a range of situations and draw valid conclusions based on logical reasoning. For some students in special schools, this might mean:

- acknowledging the presence or removal of objects

- understanding concepts like "more" and "less" or "big" and "small"

- managing position, location and direction

- demonstrating counting, estimation and computational skills

- using different ways to compare the length, weight, capacity of objects and distance between objects, and record the results

- developing spatial sense

- employing simple logical reasoning for drawing valid conclusions (logical inference)

- applying mathematical concepts in authentic situations, mathematical contexts and other disciplines

Students in special schools are expected to apply mathematical skills, number sense and spatial sense in a wide variety of subject-related lessons as well as in other contexts in school and in the community in which comparisons, measurements, estimations, counting and computations are required. Staff in special schools may therefore target essential cognitive and mathematical skills for students across the curriculum and in individual planning.

Information Technology Skills[9]

Information technology skills enable students to search for, select, analyse, manage and share information in a wide range of contexts. For some students in special schools, this may entail:

- using electronic equipment in support of communication and accessing information

- operating hand-held devices, tablets and computers in everyday situations

---

[8] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), p.53.
[9] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), p.54.

3

- understanding personal safety when using the Internet

- using technology and software to search/process information, support learning and present ideas

- undertaking online enquiry and research

- using IT tools to facilitate collaborative learning, problem solving and self-directed learning

Information technology skills will be important for many students in special schools who, for example, use switches or voice synthesisers to communicate requests, responses, choices and preferences or ideas and feelings; or undertake enquiry, information collection and research using mobile phones, tablets and computers. These skills will be relevant to these students in every lesson across the curriculum and in daily life outside lessons. For students with disabilities, information technology skills can be truly liberating. Many students in special schools may therefore have targets related to information technology skills in their individualised education programme.

Critical Thinking Skills[10]

Critical thinking skills allow students to derive meaning from the information they receive; to draw logical conclusions based on evidence; and ultimately to evaluate the credibility of opinions, views and arguments. For some students in special schools, this may mean:

- classifying objects, information and ideas

- understanding cause and effect

- making predictions and drawing logical evidence-based conclusions

- differentiating between facts and opinions

- understanding others' perspectives, and reflecting upon and evaluating the thought processes and arguments of themselves and others

Creativity[11]

Creativity involves change and transformation. It is demonstrated through the generation of new ideas, actions or artefacts. Creativity for some students in special schools may entail:

---

[10] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), p.55.
[11] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), pp.56-57.

- showing interest, curiosity and a desire to find out more

- enjoying make-believe, pretend play and fantasy

- developing imaginative and unusual new responses

- elaborating and refining original ideas

- taking risks in exploring novel or challenging ways of working

- distinguishing details from observation and responding to stimuli swiftly

- adapting varied ideas and initiating new thoughts for action

The development of creativity in special schools also involves some favourable factors for nurturing students' creativity. For details, please refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017).

Problem Solving Skills[12]

Problem solving skills involve using a variety of skills to resolve a difficulty or challenge by investigating a problem, gathering information, generating ideas for taking action, and adjusting and evaluating the strategies adopted. For students in special schools, problem solving skills play a key role in enabling them to cope with daily life challenges especially in their adulthood. Problem solving for some students in special schools can mean:

- identifying and confronting a problem or challenge

- trying out different strategies for resolving the difficulty

- adjusting and improving strategies for higher effectiveness

- evaluating strategies and outcomes in terms of their relevance to future challenges

- consolidating insights to build experience and knowledge

Self-management Skills[13]

Self-management skills comprise essential life skills and personal qualities including maintaining social and emotional stability, making decisions and exercising self-discipline. As introduced in Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), self-management skills encompass different elements. Examples of development of self-management skills for some students in special schools may include:

- developing self-help skills and skills for independent living[14]

- developing positive beliefs about themselves

---

[12] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), p.58.
[13] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), pp.59-60.
[14] Refer to Section 3.2 on "Self-help Skills and Skills for Independent Living" in this chapter.

- expressing emotions appropriately and acknowledging and accepting emotional changes

- looking after personal properties and shared resources

- learning to manage behaviour and to exercise self-control

- making decisions in daily life situations with supporting reasons

- developing motivation, confidence, resilience and adaptability

Self-learning Skills[15]

Self-learning skills enable students to initiate, plan, carry out, evaluate and adjust learning activities autonomously, ultimately leading them to select or design effective strategies for in-depth learning. Self-learning skills for some students in special schools might encompass:

- learning to focus attention and to concentrate on a task

- becoming motivated to participate, to investigate and to enquire

- initiating learning activities independently and with others

- planning and setting goals for self-initiated learning based on the information available

- evaluating and adjusting learning strategies to improve outcomes

Collaboration Skills[16]

Collaboration skills, including communication, appreciation, negotiation, making compromises and leadership, enable students to engage in and to contribute to tasks involving teamwork. Collaboration skills can enable students in special schools to reach their full potential in and beyond school. For some students, it might include:

- being willing to cooperate with other people

- working in a pair with a member of staff or another student

- adjusting behaviour and accepting a role to contribute to the activities of a group

- recognising the need for teamwork and the shared responsibilities of a team

- listening to others, acknowledging their contributions and working co-operatively

---

[15] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), p.61.
[16] Refer to Appendix 1 to Booklet 2 of the SECG (2017), pp.62-63.

In addition to the nine generic skills, staff in special schools may make use of **other categories of essential skills to set personalised targets** for individual students and integrate these elements within subject lessons. It is an important aspect of practice to address the individual needs of students in special schools. These essential skills may include:

Fine and Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills involve the movement and co-ordination of the heads, arms, legs and larger body parts. Fine motor skills are involved in the smaller movements that occur in the hands, wrists, fingers and thumbs, feet, toes and face. Students in special schools may demonstrate the development of fine and gross motor skills in a range of ways including:

- gaining head control and learning to re-orientate the head

- reaching and grasping objects and bringing objects towards the face

- standing, walking, jumping, swimming, throwing, kicking and catching

- picking up and manipulating objects, e.g. holding and controlling pens and pencils for writing and drawing

- using switches, trackpads and touch screens to operate computers and mobility and communication aids

Perceptual Skills

Perceptual skills involve making use of available sensory modalities in order to derive perceptions from sensations and to drive cognitive processing. Perceptual skills are closely linked with motor skills and cognitive skills and, for some students in special schools, may include:

- perceiving and tracking lights and movements and achieving visual recognition and discrimination

- focusing on sounds, listening and developing auditory acuity

- touching objects and textures and learning to derive meaning from tactile information

- making use of the sense of smell and olfactory stimuli to understand and operate within the environment

- learning to differentiate a range of tastes and to express preferences (for example, among foods)

Mobility Skills

Many students in special schools gain mobility by using their gross and fine motor skills. For these students, these categories of skills will overlap. Other students develop mobility

skills using alternative and augmentative strategies. For some students in special schools, therefore, mobility skills may include:

- learning to crawl and then to stand using support

- standing, walking and running

- using mobility aids such as standing frames and walking frames

- using wheeled equipment such as rollators, seated scooters, cycles and wheelchairs

- using powered mobility aids to move around indoor and outdoor environments independently

Self-help Skills and Skills for Independent Living

Schools can address self-help skills and skills for independent living for students as part of self-management skills. However, some schools may wish to give these important skills their own prominence in the curriculum. For some students in special schools, self-help skills and skills for independent living may include:

- skills in self-care such as dressing, undressing, personal hygiene and grooming

- skills related to food, including eating, drinking, food preparation and cookery

- improving fitness and well-being through appropriate regular exercise and by following a balanced diet

- household cleaning and maintenance for safety and sanitation

- travelling independently to use shopping and other local facilities in the community, e.g. banks as an element in self-management of finances

In general, acquiring and developing the skills set out here can often be embedded in learning focused on subjects and other timetabled sessions. For example, teachers can help students develop self-management and sensory motor skills in Chinese Language or Mathematics lessons. On the other hand, schools may also use flexibly lesson time and learning time to plan activities focusing specifically on these skills subject to students' needs. Developing students' generic skills and other life skills can have an enabling function in the curriculum, facilitating learning in subject lessons and other classroom activities as well as life-wide learning for whole-person development.

Values and Attitudes

Special schools, like ordinary schools, should nurture students' positive values and attitudes through incorporating related elements into various KLAs/subjects and other relevant learning experiences through life-wide learning. Life opportunities for students in special schools are changing rapidly, and schools should be committed to nurturing students' skills and values and attitudes required in the future world. By developing an appropriate school-based values education curriculum and cultivating students values and attitudes in the twelve priority areas[17], special schools will be able to contribute effectively to the development of students' capacities for independent thinking as well as rational and responsible decision-making to cope with the changes and challenges of life and growth.

Brief descriptions of the priority values and attitudes are provided below to illustrate what they may mean to students in special schools.

Perseverance

All students need to develop perseverance as they will face challenges and difficulties in their personal and social development. Students in special schools in particular may be confronted with numerous obstacles and challenges in their lives in school and beyond. In view of the importance of perseverance for them in special schools, students should therefore be supported to strive in the face of adversity; to develop the confidence to learn from failure; to find ways to cope effectively with stress, so as to maintain a positive approach to changes and challenges of personal growth, learning, relationships and life.

Respect for Others

As they engage with life in a diverse community, students in special schools should be encouraged to show respect for others and to accept their differences in talents, preferences, thinking, beliefs and lifestyles. They should establish peaceful, harmonious and friendly relationships with people from a variety of different backgrounds (including relatives, classmates, colleagues, carers and social contacts).

---

[17] In December 2023, the EDB added "Unity" and "Filial Piety" to the existing ten priority values and attitudes. For details of the values education curriculum framework and the priority values and attitudes, please refer to the *Values Education Curriculum Framework (Pilot Version)*(2021).

3

Responsibility

Students in special schools will take different roles (for example, as students, children in the family and peers) in the course of their daily lives. Schools should encourage them to accept these different roles and to take responsibility for their own contributions. Students should also learn to recognise that the collective well-being of the community is built upon the caring, helpful and responsible attitudes of individuals.

National Identity

It is an important goal of school curriculum and the responsibility of schools to cultivate students a sense of national identity. In view of our country's continuous development, special schools should take into consideration students' ability levels and help deepen students' understanding of our country, the Constitution and the Basic Law, national security education and the concept of "one country, two systems", as well as their identification with Chinese culture, so as to strengthen their sense of national identity. It will benefit their future development and encourage them to contribute to the betterment of individuals, the society and our country.

Commitment

Students shall demonstrate commitment and continue to carry out duties and tasks in spite of any difficulties or challenges that they may face. Acting with commitment also entails having the courage to address problems and to strive for improvement. Students in special schools can be guided to commit themselves to make contributions to the well-being of others and the society.

Integrity

Students with integrity will keep promises they have made, do what they say they will do and try their best to live up to the expectations of others. Integrity facilitates truthful communication and helps establish mutual trust between individuals and within the community. Honesty and integrity are important aspects of character development and contribute significantly to social relationships and participation.

Care for Others[18]

Students shall demonstrate care for others through showing their concern for others' situations, feelings, preferences and needs. A caring person will see things from others' perspectives. It is important that students in special schools learn to understand others' circumstances and offer them timely and appropriate support. Developing a sense of care will help students establish good interpersonal relationships and extend their care for the welfare of the disadvantaged in the society, animals and the environment, so as to help build a caring campus and a harmonious society.

Law-abidingness

Special schools should develop students' law-abiding awareness and let them realise that abiding by the law is their basic responsibility for the common good of the community. Through exercising self-discipline, respecting rules and fulfilling their rights and responsibilities as citizens, students will become contributing members of the stable society.

Empathy

Students will develop empathy when they make an effort to understand others' perspectives, circumstances and feelings. Cultivating empathy in students in special schools will enable them to accept and appreciate one another, initiate prosocial behaviours and therefore help build a harmonious and caring community.

Diligence

Students shall exhibit diligence as they devote themselves to learning, personal goals or the assigned tasks and make persistent effort to achieve growth and excellence. Diligence requires students to develop discipline, exert physical and mental effort and build stamina to see things through in their lives. It is important for students in special schools to develop diligence through putting what they have learned into practice as daily habits. With the virtue of diligence, students will be able to understand and respect the work of labour as well as make contributions to themselves, their families and society.

Special schools may also select other important values and attitudes in accordance with their school mission, school context and the needs of students and their families, with a view to promoting the whole-person development of students. Most importantly, school staff should serve as role models to their students as teaching by words and examples is highly important in values education. In addition, education for values and attitudes should be integrated into learning and teaching across the curriculum within or beyond lessons and in life-wide learning activities. Often learning in relation to values and attitudes will be realised through diversified learning and teaching strategies rather than curriculum content. All-round and everyday life learning experiences and opportunities can be provided to nurture students' good moral character and conduct. The pedagogies that facilitate learning

---

[18] "Care for Others" was optimised to be "Benevolence" in December 2023.

3

and teaching in special schools will be further explored in Chapter 4 "Developing Effective Approaches to Learning and Teaching".

> ## For reflection and action
>
> ● How are the generic skills, values and attitudes embedded in lessons and learning opportunities in your school? How could this process be improved?
>
> ● How is IT used in your school to facilitate the development of communication, the exchange of ideas and the co-construction of knowledge among students?

3.3 The Curriculum and Specific Learning Elements for Students in Different Key Stages

Progression as a key principle in curriculum development is introduced in Chapter 2 "Curriculum Planning in Special Schools". This section examines the possibilities for establishing progression for the curriculum elements within the central curriculum framework across different key stages.

The Curriculum and Specific Learning Elements in Key Stages 1 and 2

Like ordinary primary schools, special schools plan the curriculum and timetable learning opportunities in terms of a range of KLAs/subjects as advised by the EDB to help students develop related knowledge, skills and values and attitudes. These subjects, such as Chinese Language and Mathematics, are also commonly taught in Key Stages 1 and 2 in special schools. In addition, it is possible to address the KLAs/subjects for younger students by planning, either during regular thematic teaching weeks or, in terms of cross-curricular themes or topics in which the content of the subjects is integrated.

Schools may exercise their discretion to address specific learning elements through embedding them in subject teaching, making use of cross-curricular learning and/or flexible time arrangements to timetable other sessions according to priorities and specific aims (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3 "Establishing Aims for the School Curriculum") within the school-based curriculum. For example, in ordinary primary schools, these sessions might include class periods, library time or tutorial groups. Special schools can provide students in the primary phase with the learning activities that are age-appropriate and meet their special needs, for example:

- self-care activities for students in Key Stage 1, and sessions devoted to expanding self-management skills for students in Key Stage 2

- early experiences outside school through life-wide learning opportunities

- sensory motor learning for students with physical and sensory impairments and severe intellectual disability

- communication skills activities through collaboration between subject teachers and speech therapists

The Curriculum and Specific Learning Elements in Key Stage 3

The curriculum for students in Key Stage 3 is developed from the same core components as for students in the primary phase. Again, the KLAs such as Chinese Language and Mathematics are commonly taught through subjects. There are also more choices of subjects offered in some KLAs. For example, schools can select and deliver the learning content as subjects (such as Technology and Living) among the learning strands in the Technology Education KLA. While the junior secondary curriculum may be organised by subjects in school timetables, schools are encouraged to exercise flexibility in arranging cross-curricular and life-wide learning activities to broaden and contextualise learning for students. Learning experiences for students in junior secondary may include, for example:

- STEAM education/innovative and technology education

- life skills education

- community service

- values education

- Constitution and Basic Law education

Special schools might also need to take account of students' specific needs and to make use of flexible time arrangements to timetable sessions dedicated to other age-appropriate matters, for example:

- independent living skills

- skills for life in the community

- the development of interpersonal skills

- prevocational experiences

- sessions focused on priority areas of learning in adolescence including personal growth and sex education

3

The Curriculum and Specific Learning Elements in Key Stage 4

The curriculum for students in Key Stage 4 builds upon knowledge, skills and values and attitudes gained in earlier phases of education. Students in senior secondary in ordinary schools study four core subjects, Chinese Language, Mathematics, English Language and Citizenship and Social Development, and choose to study two or three elective subjects (up to a maximum of four) drawn from a range of options that typically includes subjects based in the KLAs, for example, Economics, Tourism and Hospitality Studies, Health Management and Social Care.

Elective subjects in the senior secondary curriculum also include Applied Learning courses which focus on practical learning elements linked to broad professional and vocational fields with dual emphasis on theory and practice. In addition, the senior secondary curriculum provides Other Learning Experiences (OLE) in five areas - Values Education, Community Service, Aesthetic Development, Physical Development and Career-related Experiences. The focus of learning in Key Stage 4 should further facilitate students' lifelong learning capabilities and promote their whole-person development.

Besides the above curriculum elements, special schools may need to adopt these specific elements in their curriculum in Key Stage 4 with consideration of other learning priorities to address their students' special needs, such as:

- transition planning and planning for life beyond school
- exploring options for exit pathways and setting goals based on aspirations for adult life
- making connections between plans for work/employment and life and personal interests and aptitudes
- further developing skills for independent living and life in the community
- exploring career options and developing skills for employment

3.4 Planning for Transitions and Life-wide Learning in the School-based Curriculum

The balance between various elements in the curriculum in Key Stage 4 may need to be adjusted based upon a careful analysis of each student's prior attainments, their interests and preferences, and their ideas (and the views of members of their families) about exit pathways and transitions into adult life (for suggestions on planning for students' transition to adult life, please refer to Chapter 7 "Beyond School – Exit Pathways, Opportunities and Outcomes").

For example, regarding the provision of elective subjects at the senior secondary level, some students may choose elective subjects (such as Business, Accounting and Financial Studies or Tourism and Hospitality Studies) in order to develop their aspirations for employment. Other students may wish to continue to pursue subject-based learning (such as language learning or Physical Education) in preparation for extended periods of education or to apply the relevant skills and knowledge in life beyond school. Some students may choose elective subjects that help promote their independent living and/or quality of life (such as Technology and Living, Information and Communication Technology, Visual Arts and Music). Elective subjects therefore provide opportunities to personalise the curriculum for students in special schools. To prepare students for life beyond school systematically in curriculum provision, special schools will also need to help stretch students' potential and empower them to connect their interests, abilities and aspirations, through life planning education, with their adult lives.

The focus and balance in planning for transitions into life beyond school is likely to be different for many students in special schools compared with their age peers in ordinary schools. In this respect, life-wide learning is particularly important to supporting the independent living and the integration of these students into the community in the future. **Life-wide learning should be implemented in special schools for students in all age groups and key stages in order to ensure relevance of the curriculum to them**. Learning opportunities may need to be provided for some students in special schools, for example, on skills for daily life (e.g. self-care, home maintenance), life in the community and use of leisure time. As indicated in Section 3.2, these kinds of functional elements can be

3

integrated into the teaching of subjects. On the other hand, schools should provide a direct focus on preparation for adult life in the timetable as well as life-wide learning activities where this is required and make adjustments to ensure a balanced curriculum.

Planning for life-wide learning involves deciding which learning targets, aims or objectives can be taught most effectively in authentic contexts or in the classroom and which might require a different range of learning activities and contexts for learning. Schools can adopt different models[19] to integrate life-wide learning opportunities into students' learning experiences. These models are likely to involve cross-curricular or integrated models of planning and to incorporate extra-curricular activities. For example, schools may:

- timetable a double/triple period each week to enable students to broaden their experiences beyond the classroom and into the community

- organise events such as camping trips, visits to places of interest or discipline and team building activities annually or regularly in order to enhance students' collaboration, problem solving and social skills

- organise the activities by cross-curricular themes (such as "Our environment" or "Work in our city") or project work so that subject-related learning is embedded in activities and experiences with learning taking place beyond school and the classroom

Therefore, KLA/subject-related learning and life-wide learning can complement each other very effectively. Schools should adopt life-wide learning as an important strategy that accords closely with the curriculum objectives, and connect it with learning and teaching of different KLAs/subjects, cross-curricular learning and co-curricular activities, so as to provide students with opportunities for whole-person development. As the framework of the central curriculum is designed to be used flexibly, all schools can use flexible time arrangements in order to emphasise life-wide learning, which has a number of functions[20], for example:

- **extending** learning gained through KLAs/subjects in order to deepen students' understanding in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes

- **enriching** learning experiences by making links between subjects and community-based activities; helping develop students' potential and broadening their horizons through various co-curricular activities or interest groups

---

[19] For details of different models of implementing life-wide learning, please refer to Chapter 8.4.2 of the PECG (2024).
[20] Refer to Booklet 7 of the SECG (2017), p.5 and Chapter 8.2.1 of the PECG (2024).
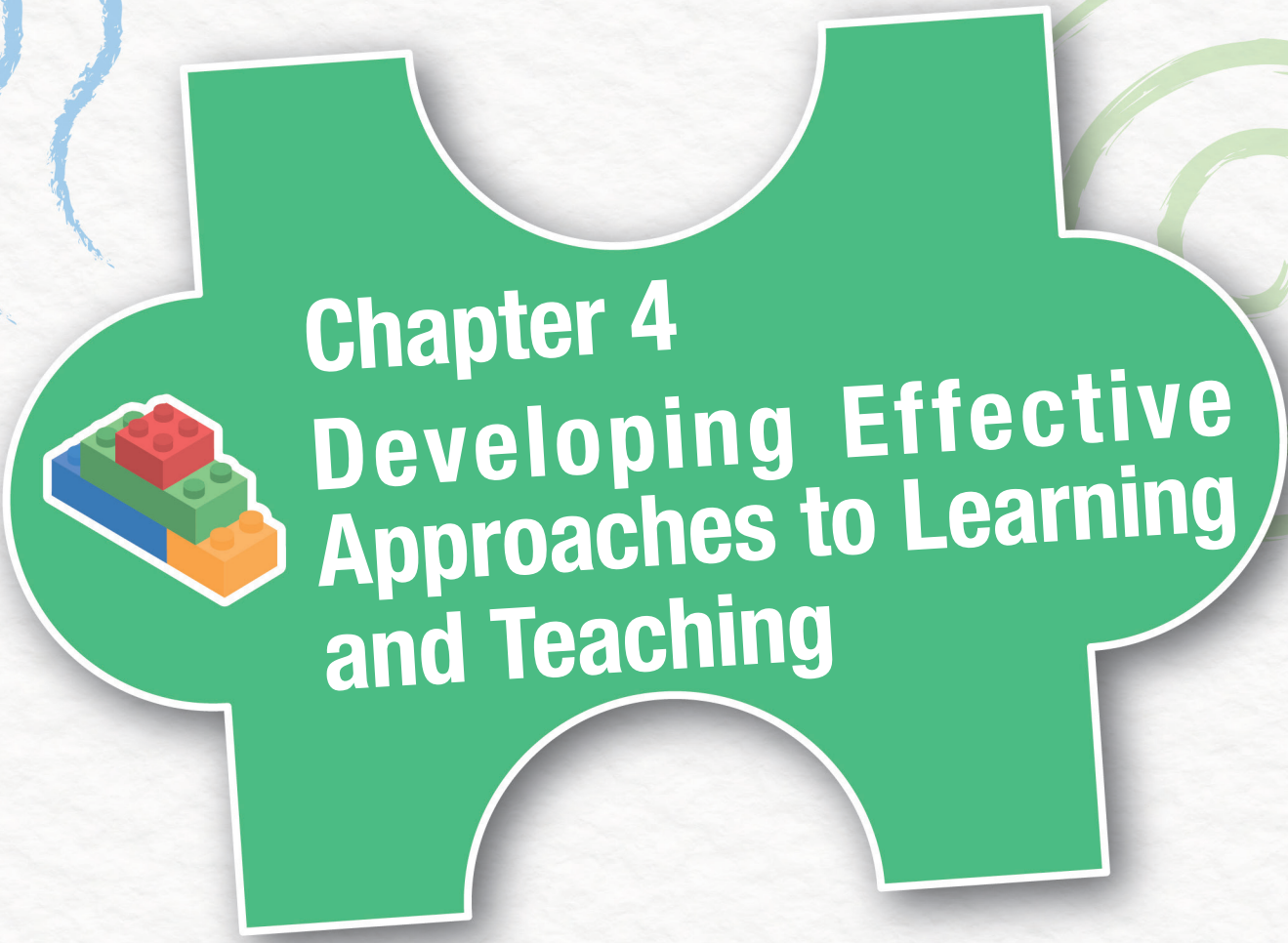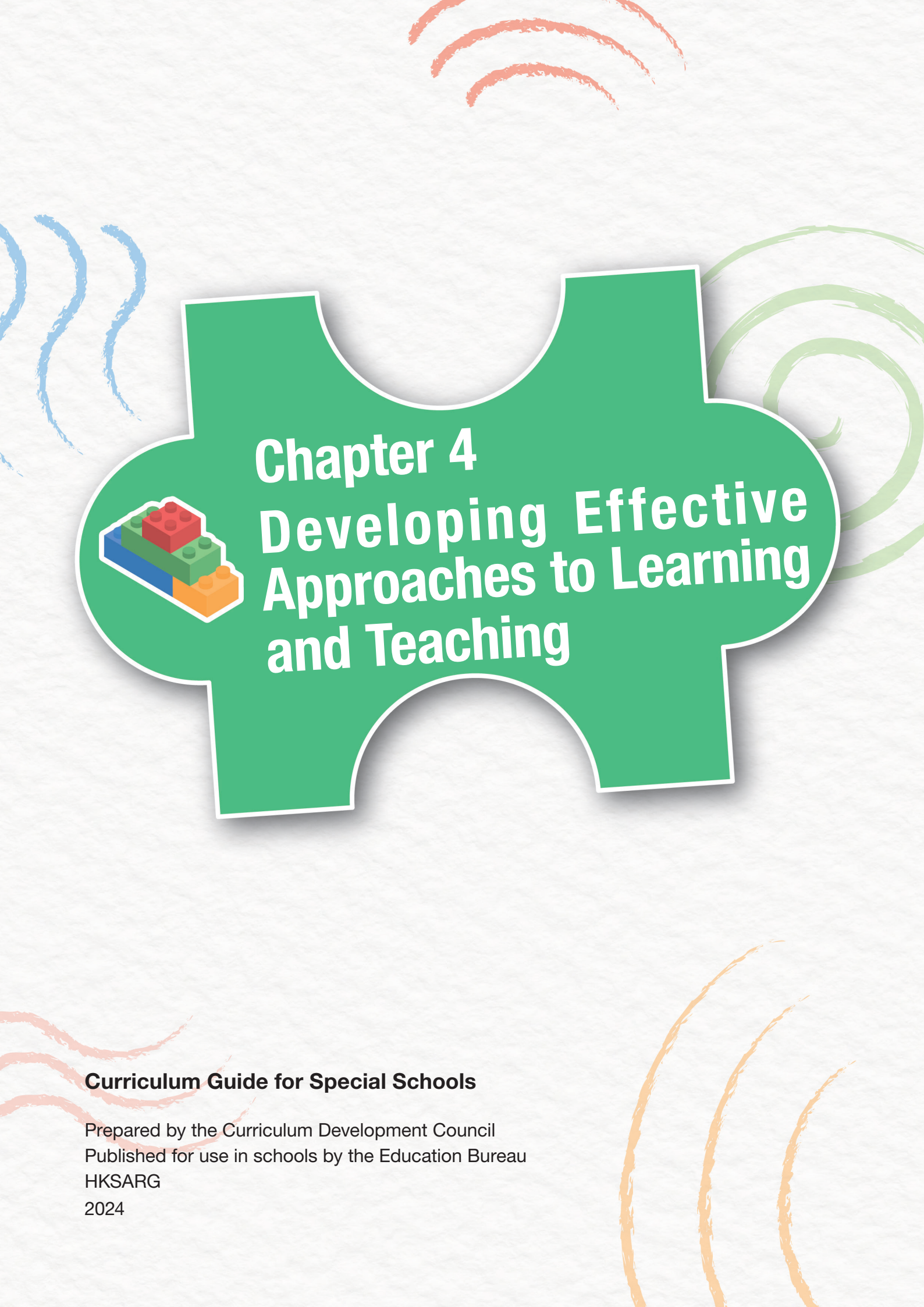
- **consolidating** learning gained through personal and social education by foregrounding ongoing well-being and future quality of life

- **enabling** learning by developing generic skills and skills for life that can facilitate their learning in different contexts

The process of extending learning for students in special schools can be supported through computer-based and online learning, simulations and authentic contexts (such as trips into the community to visit places of interest). These learning processes will offer students opportunities to contextualise school-based learning and will allow students to apply what they have learned in school to real life situations, for example, by putting gross motor and mobility skills learned in Physical Education lessons into action in parks and leisure facilities. Such kinds of community-based experiences can also enrich student learning, where these similar outcomes can be found in co-curricular activities and interest classes, allowing students to broaden their horizons and to explore wider and more diverse aspects of their interests and potential for growth. Different effective teaching approaches that can enrich learning for students in special schools are explored further in Chapter 4.

For reflection and action

- What kinds of learning experiences do students in special schools need to prepare for their adult lives in a changing society?

- How does contact with agencies and organisations outside school impact positively upon student learning?

- How could you help students demonstrate and apply what they have learned in activities in their daily lives?

Chapter 4
Developing Effective Approaches to Learning and Teaching

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

Prepared by the Curriculum Development Council
Published for use in schools by the Education Bureau
HKSARG
2024

Contents

Chapter 4
Developing Effective Approaches to Learning and Teaching

Page

This is one of the 7 chapters in the *Curriculum Guide for Special Schools.* Its contents are as follows:

4

Developing Effective Approaches to Learning and Teaching

4.1 Active Learning, Self-directed Learning and Learning to Learn

All teachers should consider the kinds of learning they wish to promote for their students and the kinds of learners they intend their students to become. These considerations are particularly important when students have special educational needs and significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff should think about learning from the students' point of view and how they want students to learn. This will help them develop the most appropriate kinds of teaching.

Many teachers around the world, in ordinary primary and secondary schools, as well as in special schools, have committed themselves to promoting active and deeper learning for their students. This means to move students beyond surface learning which can be achieved by repetition, learning by rote and working under adult direction or with heavy prompting. Surface learning might help students develop some skills and enable them to pass certain kinds of tests. However, it is unlikely that it can engage students in thorough understanding, critical engagement or independence in learning.

Enabling Students to be Active Learners

Active learning lays the foundation for deep learning[21] and self-directed learning. Students who are active learners are motivated to learn, to participate actively and to quest for knowledge. They also develop greater sense of ownership in learning and become more responsible for their own learning. Teachers in an ordinary secondary school, defined this kind of learning for their students as:

---

[21] For the definition and details of "deep learning", please refer to the "Glossary" part of the Introduction and Booklet 3 of the SECG (2017).

> *". . . a dynamic process based on collaboration, trust, support and encouragement among teachers and students. It involves continuous involvement of students taking account of their needs and interests in the educational process by creating a positive learning environment facilitating active discovery (through, for example, research, theory-practice connection and problem solving applied tasks). Within this process the student becomes independent, critically thinking, reflective and communicative."*

Staff working in a school with students with learning difficulties committed themselves to promoting:

> *"learning that is active, experiential, exploratory, student-led, interactive, dialogic, intrinsically motivating, practical, multimodal, multi-sensory, holistic, coherent, connected to prior learning, challenging, meaningful, relevant and that engages the whole student."*

These definitions and descriptions are only examples. Each school should explore the meanings of active learning and deep learning for their own context and for their own students. Building the shared definitions of active learning and deep learning with commitment to promoting these kinds of learning by all the staff is a valuable exercise that helps enhance student's learning effectiveness. Staff members and other stakeholders, including family members and students, are encouraged to work in collaboration. It is helpful for students themselves, for example, to understand the kinds of learning and the characteristics among learners that are valued in their school, so as to reflect on and enhance their own learning.

For reflection and action

- How do you and your colleagues define active learning and deep learning for your students? Try working together to develop and refine the definitions for your school to suit your students' abilities and needs.

Preparing Teachers for Promoting Active Learning

Deeper learning can be promoted through pedagogies that involve students as active learners. Staff need to ensure that learning targets and objectives as well as challenges are clearly identified for students and relevant to the context in which they occur. This means that students will be encouraged to recognise the purpose of learning and teaching

4

activities. Effective learning and teaching strategies should also be used to engage them actively and meaningfully in the learning activities.

To achieve deeper learning, students should be encouraged to initiate interactions and explorations and to stretch their potential within the learning context. Students may be encouraged to:

- solve problems

- express choices, preferences and personal views

- work with and support one another

- make discoveries

In order to promote active learning for students in special schools, teachers need to take account of individual students' prior skills, achievements and experiences in their planning. Where assessment is to take place, teachers can share performance criteria or targets with students. When learners have meaningful access to the aims and purposes of an activity, they can then be involved in self-evaluation and self-review as learning proceeds. This means in turn that learners can direct and regulate their own learning, becoming increasingly aware of and responsible for their own progress and attainment. For instance, students can learn how to set goals, and during the learning process, they can monitor and reflect on their learning experiences. After evaluating their learning progress, students can identify ways to improve their learning. These kinds of capabilities are crucial to learning to learn and effective self-directed learning, equipping students for learning and applying what they have learned in a range of contexts rather than just completing one specific task.

Promoting active learning involves the engagement of the whole learner. This means working with many aspects of the student as a person, including their interests, their feelings and their preferences. Staff in special schools shall recognise that serious learning can often be achieved through activities that are fun. Effective learning can often be best achieved through activities that stimulate genuine interest in students and generate excitement and enthusiasm through entertainment.

Learning also needs to be challenging for students. There are occasions when it is necessary to revisit prior learning and to repeat activities to make sure that students have retained or generalised their achievements. However, repetition needs to be used judiciously. Teachers shall aim to stimulate and challenge students by providing activities that are fresh, new, exciting and surprising. These activities are likely to be able to stretch students, promote new learning, or at least extend students' experiences into new areas.

This chapter has deliberately started with the perspectives of learners. It is suggested that staff perceive learning from the learner's perspective to enhance their teaching effectiveness. Indeed, understanding the learner's point of view is arguably essential to the planning of effective teaching and appropriate pedagogies. The following sections will examine some of the teaching approaches that may be considered important in special schools. These approaches are predicated on the realisation that much traditional teaching depends too heavily upon language, literacy and number skills. Some students in special schools tend to be equipped to listen to long expositions of teacher talk and then to express their understanding in verbal responses, writing or computation – but many will find these approaches inappropriate. Teachers therefore need to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies and diversify their pedagogical approaches to capitalise on students' strengths and preferences and provide them with varied, meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

4

4.2 Multi-sensory Approaches

Multi-sensory approaches to learning provide opportunities to make activities exciting and stimulating for students in special schools. These elements are essential for students with sensory and physical impairments with particular regard to developing their perceptual and motor skills. Staff may incorporate a range of sensory inputs into lessons in order to maximise involvement for students who may experience barriers to learning in any single sensory domain (for example, vision or hearing).

Sensory inputs may include elements that emphasise:

- visual stimulation (using bright lights, shiny surfaces or moving objects)

- hearing (including loud and soft sounds, music and musical instruments, sound sources that move about the room or virtual space)

- touch and feeling (through objects that have different surface textures or hard or soft compositions)

- the sense of smell (using food items, drinks, different natural and man-made materials and substances that generate aromas)

- taste (using different foods and drinks to stimulate students and perhaps to establish preferences)

- movement, balance and positioning (so that shifts in the position of the whole body or of the limbs, for example, can provide stimulation; it could be facilitated by a member of staff or an assistant for all students, including those with impairments in other sensory domains)

Many special schools will invest in technologies to provide students with virtual realities, online learning opportunities and simulated environments. While technologies can be useful in targeting or amplifying sensory stimuli for learning, ensuring that there is a sensory dimension to lessons does not have to involve elaborate preparation or expensive equipment. Everyday items or pieces of household equipment can provide good sensory stimulus, e.g. a flashlight used in a darkened room or inside a tent can offer excellent opportunities for visual tracking. The natural environment outside the classroom can also provide endless forms of sensory stimulation – sights, sounds, smells, textures and so on. For many students, attending to the sound of the wind in the trees, feeling the texture of plants, or noticing the smell of newly-dug soil can provide fascinating sensory experiences. Many special schools thus invest in these kinds of experiences by maintaining outside environments with sensory dimensions – a sensory garden or a collection of herbs and

other fragrant plants in pots, for example – and this kind of learning can be extended into environments at home and in the community.

> ## Myth: Does using as many sensory inputs as possible at a time facilitate student learning more effectively?
>
> "Multi-sensory" teaching is particularly useful in special schools. However, meticulous observations and thoughtfully planned teaching will avoid mere sensory bombardment in which all the senses of the student are stimulated dramatically and all at once. It is often preferable to introduce the stimulation of the senses singly, trying one source of stimulation and allowing time for a response (which may be significantly delayed for many students with severe intellectual disability) before introducing a different stimulus. Allowing time for responses and observing the different reactions that students give to different stimuli will help school staff identify the kinds of sensory interventions that catch students' attention, enable them to respond, and thus to learn.
>
> It is important to remember that some students in special schools (including those with autism spectrum conditions) will be highly sensitive to sensory stimuli and may even be defensive against certain kinds of sensory input. Some students, for example, may be startled and become distressed by loud sounds; others may be tactile defensive and resist touching unfamiliar objects or textures. In all cases, new forms of sensory stimulation need to be introduced carefully so that responses can be assessed and judgements made about appropriate levels of input. Also, school staff should closely attune to the learning preferences and the characteristics of individual students. In many cases, thoughtful use of relatively gentle forms of stimulation can promote student engagement and may boost their confidence in bolder forms of experimentation in future.

Students with dual or multi-sensory impairment (for example, students who have hearing as well as visual impairments) will be unable to make use of many common forms of classroom or virtual experience, and these impairments compound their difficulties in learning in very significant ways. Therefore, staff need to plan their interventions with immense care and devote time to highly focused observations of responses to alternative stimuli. It is worth noting that sensory impairments are often extremely difficult to identify and to assess in students with severe intellectual disability. It is important for staff not to make hasty assumptions about the senses that are available to students who may appear to be unresponsive. Once again, the systematic introduction of carefully graded stimuli using each of the senses in turn followed by meticulous observation and evaluation of responses is an effective approach to identify the learning characteristics and impairments of these students for enhancing teaching effectiveness.

4

Ensuring that there are sensory dimensions to classroom and home study activities can help secure access for all students (including those with multi-sensory impairments and severe intellectual disability) to productive learning opportunities, including those opportunities related to the subjects and other important aspects of learning. Moreover, all students (including those with higher prior attainments) will benefit from engaging in practical activities, working with real objects, exploring genuine situations and investigating authentic processes. Special schools should therefore provide tangible sensory dimensions to learning for all students.

> **For reflection and action**
>
> ● How do you use multi-sensory strategies in your teaching to help students build on their strengths and address their weaknesses?
>
> ● Think about the variety of learning and teaching strategies used in your school. How do these strategies provide multiple personalised opportunities to help students reach their full learning potential?

4.3 Modes of Communication

Language and literacy skills are core competencies for learning, whereas communication skills are the functional foundation for language and literacy skills development. Communication involves expressing and receiving messages. Students need to learn to understand the messages and feelings expressed by others through communication. They also need to learn to express themselves, including putting forward requests, giving responses, indicating choices and preferences, and expressing ideas and feelings, etc. Special schools should develop their own policies on communication in order to offer students opportunities to understand others and to express themselves.

Different Modes of Communication

Students should be encouraged to use the modes of communication appropriate to their needs. These might include but are not limited to:

● **body language, gestures, physical activities and behaviours** – for example, pointing to a preferred toy, turning the head away or move away to say "no", or waving goodbye

- **looking, eye pointing/attending, eye gazing and facial expressions** – for example, maintaining gaze on items of interest, looking towards a preferred object or grimacing at an unpleasant taste

- **using real objects to signal, give cues or indicate preferences** – for example, picking up a cup to request more drink or selecting a towel to indicate "I want to go swimming"

- **tactile cues and tactile tracking** – for example, learning to identify the smooth shiny texture as a signifier of "my photograph" or to follow naturally occurring tactile cues around the environment to locate specified resources or locating teaching areas around the school by finding tactile name plates outside each room

- conventional gestures using combinations of **manual signs and facial expressions, and/or formal sign language** – for example, smiling and nodding with hands reaching out to indicate "yes please" when offered preferred food items, or signing requests to go to the "toilet"

- **picture exchange communication systems** using photographs, pictures, line drawings and symbols – for example, picking out a photograph of the school bus to indicate "I'm going home" or carrying a small set of individual symbols or pictures to express essential needs

- **information and communication technologies** – for example, pressing a switch to indicate "yes" or "no", pressing a switch-activated voice synthesiser/speech generator to express a response or creating connected sequences of meanings using a touch screen tablet

- **vocalisation and approximation** – for example, vocalising in response to questions, and making approximate sounds for the names of familiar people as greetings or making requests

- **spoken language** – for example, following verbal instructions, using single words or simple utterances or phrases to express ideas, engaging in daily conversations

- **written language** – for example, recognising written words in association with photographs, reading, writing on paper or typing on keyboards

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

The forms of communication are "multimodal" as various modalities are involved. Special schools should help students make use of different modalities, such as visual, oral, aural, tactile, etc. of communication by taking into account the sensory modalities that individual students can manage. These forms of communication can be "augmentative and alternative" to supplement, support or reinforce (augment) or to replace (provide alternatives to) dominant forms of communication, such as listening, speaking, reading or writing which the students could not manage. These modes of communication can also be used as alternative strategies in cases where conventional skills are affected by an impairment (e.g. sensory or physical impairments).

4

The augmentative and alternative functions of AAC are illustrated by the following examples respectively:

- Augmentative function – Students with severe intellectual disability could use pictures, photographs, objects, symbols or gestures to augment conventional speaking and writing skills where these skills are emerging or developing;

- Alternative function – Sign language could be used as an alternative to speech for students with profound hearing impairment who cannot develop speech and benefit from the hearing aids; or sequencing objects as an alternative to symbols or written words for students with visual impairment.

Special schools should establish communication systems for their students to allow indication of requests, responses, decisions, choices and preferences, ideas and feelings. This is to ensure that views of students are respected, acknowledged and acted upon. In order to enhance self-determination and provide improved levels of personal safety, it is also essential that students should be encouraged to develop a means of communicating "no" to give a negative response or as a form of refusal. These strategies may range from turning the head or moving the body away from objects, pushing objects away or off the table, to head shaking or using signs or symbols to indicate "no".

Staff in special schools should establish appropriate communication systems and make adjustments for students according to their capacities, communication needs and development as well as the communication contexts.

Early Forms of Communication

Communication is not only strongly represented in the Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs)[22] for Chinese Language for students with intellectual disability, but also at the early levels (i.e. Initial Mastery Levels, "I Levels") in the LPFs for other subjects, where Levels I1 to I6 are about development in communication. The level descriptions assume that communication is pre-intentional at Levels I1 to I3 and intentional communication emerges at I4 to I5. The examples of learning outcomes given in the I Levels show some of the communicative behaviours that might be observed, for example, looking, attending, eye pointing, gesture, body language and whole body responses, actions and facial expressions.

---

[22] The *Learning Progression Frameworks for Students with Intellectual Disabilities* were developed to complement the implementation of the curricula of different subjects. They can be part of school assessment mechanisms for assessing the learning progress and attainment levels of students in different subjects. For details, please refer to the "Special Educational Needs" webpage of the EDB (https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/index.html).

All these forms of communication can be used both expressively and receptively by staff and students to express ideas (for example, a student showing a picture to represent "I would like a biscuit, please") and to comprehend messages (for example, a student responding appropriately to a teacher signing "time to put on your coat").

These forms of communication can be used conventionally as whole-school communication systems or adapted for use by individual students. For example, a school making provision for students with intellectual disability and/or sensory impairments might decide, as a matter of whole school policy to:

- use a school-wide system of visual and tactile symbols to label, at child height, the door to every room in the school (e.g. "Class 3", "Toilet", "Library", etc.)

- operate a system of pictorial schedules in each class as an accessible timetable of activities

- establish whole-school vocabularies of basic gestures and manual signs to augment routine spoken instructions (e.g. "please sit down", "lunch time", "Mathematics lesson", etc.)

Schools might also establish communication systems for individual students according to their communication needs, for example, a picture exchange communication system for a student not yet mastering the use of symbols; use of objects in communication for a student with visual impairment; and a speech generating device for a student with physical disabilities that result in insufficient vocal control.

If students show communicative responses that are different from those set in the learning outcomes in the LPFs at Levels I1 to I6 but are cognitively equivalent (for example, using vocalisation rather than eye contact, gestures or actions to seek attention), these responses should be perceived as equivalent attainments. Schools might record such responses as the learning performance of the students.

Assessing early communication skills of students is not easy for teachers. Teachers could work in collaboration with speech therapists in identifying students' communication intents and acts, and collect, analyse and record more comprehensive performance examples according to the LPFs so as to allow illustration of progress of the students at a particular level.

> ### For reflection and action
>
> - As a teacher, how do you make decisions about applying your knowledge, understanding and experience of different approaches to communication to support student learning?

4

4.4 Group Work and Peer Interaction

Grouping is an important form of differentiation that can support the learning of students in special schools. Teachers should provide students with opportunities, according to the learning objectives and contexts, for whole class sessions, working in groups of various sizes and compositions, as well as for individual teaching.

There are many ways and forms of grouping. At times, for example, it is useful to create teaching groups of students with similar prior attainments – e.g. a group of students working at a similar level in Mathematics. Such teaching groups are referred to as "sets" or homogeneous groups. Other times, it will be helpful to teach using heterogeneous or mixed groups so that students can engage in activities using different prior knowledge and skills at different levels. In carefully planned activities for mixed groups of students, the potential for interdependent and collaborative learning can be explored and exploited.

Mixed groups can be seen as using a "jigsaw" approach, in which students with different capabilities can work together on different elements of a task to achieve a shared outcome. Working in this way allows students to benefit from observing their peers undertaking aspects of the activity, learning from modelling and peer coaching. Peer supported learning can often be more effective than direct teaching by an adult, as this way of learning can make good use of the talents and aptitudes of all the students in a group, and in turn help students build confidence and interest in learning.

In some special schools, in particular those admitting students with intellectual disability, there has been practice of teaching these students as individual learners by teaching them individually during lessons or after class to cater for their individual differences. However, this can result in:

- additional work for staff when teaching activities have to be planned for each student

- prolonged waiting time for students as members of staff work their way around a class providing one-to-one tuition

- missed opportunities for productive interactions between students and peer supported learning

Group work can reduce much of the waiting time and avoid isolation associated with one-to-one teaching. However, group work requires the adults in the classroom to be very clear about their roles and responsibilities. Different members of staff can be deployed to support groups of students within a lesson. Other groups may be encouraged to work

without staff support to achieve more student-led outcomes. Planning for group work is multi-dimensional and can be complex. Section 4.5 below discusses how planning shared between teachers and other professionals can be particularly productive for student learning.

> **❓ For reflection and action**
>
> ● How do you develop a learning culture that promotes meaningful and collaborative learning in your lessons?
>
> ● What are the advantages, disadvantages, strengths and limitations of individualised teaching compared with group work? Consider this from the perspectives of both teachers and students.

4.5 Team Work in the Classroom

The importance of team work and collaboration is highlighted in Chapter 2 "Curriculum Planning in Special Schools", and teachers in special schools are used to working in a variety of forms of partnership. Special school teachers will recognise, for example, that therapists and support staff have valuable insights to contribute to the planning process – either as a result of professional expertise, perhaps in the identification of sensory needs, or as a result of close observation – as well as to various forms of classroom activity. Planning, teaching, observing learning and making assessments in partnerships between staff working in a special school can capitalise on the varied forms of expertise of staff involved in facilitating student learning. Different forms of professional partnership in the special school setting can include:

● partnerships between teachers

● partnerships between teachers and support staff (including teacher assistants)

● partnerships between teachers and other adults

● partnerships between teachers and other professionals (including therapists and educational psychologists)

Professional collaboration can make a valuable contribution in all phases of the planning, learning and teaching, assessment and review cycle, as discussed below.

Partnerships Between Teachers

Teachers working in special schools find that working together with other teachers can be deeply rewarding. Teachers acknowledge that planning their work in pairs or groups with other teachers can enhance the quality of the plans they produce. Colleagues bring new

4

perspectives and varied experiences to the planning task. Drawn on a range of experiences, the resulting curriculum plans are more likely to engage students in deeper learning, leading to new attainments for students. In collaborative planning, teachers can share insights into subjects, build deeper subject knowledge and improve their awareness of how to make subject learning accessible for students with difficulties in learning. These shared experiences can contribute greatly towards the development of genuine whole school approaches. Collaborative approaches to curriculum planning can lead to powerful and beneficial outcomes in special schools.

Teachers can also work closely to implement their plans. Co-teaching can take a number of forms. For example:

- teachers can share responsibility for the teaching of whole class lessons, working in close teaching partnerships and taking turns to deliver aspects of the planned session

- teachers can take responsibility for teaching different groups so that the class is divided, for parts of the lesson, into smaller clusters of students, in order that modes of access are appropriate for sub-sets of students who, for example, have similar prior attainments, who use signs to communicate or who need particular forms of sensory input

- on some occasions, one teacher might take lead responsibility for teaching while a colleague observes and records student responses

In all these forms of partnership, it is important to make sure that time is set aside, after the co-taught lesson, for review and de-briefing. In order to work effectively in teaching teams, teachers not only need to plan together but also to reflect together on the lessons they have taught; on the student responses they have seen; on the potential to make assessments on the basis of those observed responses; and on the need to review and refine future teaching in order that future lessons are more accurately focused on meeting the needs of students.

Partnerships Between Teachers and Teacher Assistants

Teacher assistants can make positive contributions to student learning and team work between teachers and teacher assistants can take many forms. Collaboration does not necessarily mean that colleagues carry out similar roles in similar ways. Asymmetrical forms of partnership, where the teacher takes the lead in planning and implementing lessons and the teacher assistant is in support, can be very effective.

On the other hand, in some schools it is acknowledged that teacher assistants have good knowledge of the students' preferences and prior attainments and can help provide opportunities to embed personal priorities for learning into plans for subject-related

teaching. In these cases, teacher assistants can contribute meaningfully to planning, while the teacher takes the lead in designing lessons and in making strategic decisions about learning and teaching.

It is likely that teacher assistants will be closely involved in learning activity, even if in a supportive role while the teacher takes the lead, so it is crucially important that they understand and share the purposes and objectives of planned lessons. Adequate time is required to share those purposes and objectives with teacher assistants as well as to inform them their roles and duties in the activities prior to lessons.

It is important that teacher assistants in special schools work closely with teachers on the delivery of lessons. This form of team work can be very effective. Teacher assistants can enable teachers to carry out vital pedagogic roles within lessons – with the former, for example, sometimes supporting individual students in their learning or sometimes attending to small groups of students; and sometimes supporting the learning for the main part of the class for parts of the lesson to enable the teacher to focus on individual students or sub-groups of students.

At all times, teacher assistants should be deployed in ways that promote more effective teaching and more successful learning – and this can only be achieved where team work and collaboration are strong. Each school will develop their own approaches to collaboration – but it will remain the responsibility of teachers to adopt a leading role in creating and sustaining all forms of professional partnership.

Team work, involving any adults who can make a contribution to learning and teaching, can bring benefits to individual students, to groups and in some cases to the whole class. Many special schools deploy teacher assistants in support of learning and teaching, whether focusing on the needs of specific groups of students or as staff working in particular subject areas. In some classes in some special schools, lessons also benefit from the presence of adult volunteers or members of staff employed to support particular students. Where learning is extended into the home, family members and friends can also make their contributions to learning. The roles of these additional adults must, of course, be carefully negotiated and managed. In particular, teachers have a leading role in any learning and teaching team and should plan carefully for all forms of partnership to support student learning effectively.

For reflection and action

● In what ways does your school encourage partnerships in the classroom between teachers and teacher assistants?

● How could these partnerships be developed in order to support the learning and attainment of students?

Partnerships Between Teachers and Other Professionals

The partnerships between teachers and other professionals are among the most powerful forms of collaboration found in special schools. The contributions of a speech therapist to planning and implementing strategies to enhance communication can be hugely significant given that language and communication play such major roles in the curriculum in special schools. For example, speech therapists may collaborate with teachers to help students apply the communication skills and strategies in learning and other school activities so as to enhance the communicative responses for attaining learning outcomes. Further, educational psychologists with their expertise in cognitive development of students with special educational needs will be able to provide consultation on the process of establishing, reviewing and refining priorities and targets for learning for individual students.

Different professionals can make contributions in special schools in various ways. Senior staff and curriculum leaders in special schools should develop, foster and sustain ways of involving other professionals in planning activities in collaboration with teachers. These professionals can participate and contribute at levels of whole school policy with long, medium and short term planning. With detailed planning and clear delineation of work, they can also make valuable and direct contribution in terms of classroom learning. Transdisciplinary partnerships that synergise knowledge, skills and experience of teachers, support staff and other professionals, provide students with special educational needs with supportive and facilitating contexts and environments for effective communication and learning.

For reflection and action

● In what ways are therapists and other professionals involved in learning and teaching in your school?

● How could your school encourage these professionals to make more direct contributions to learning and teaching in classrooms and beyond?

Other Forms of Partnership

Other forms of partnership can also contribute to learning for students in special schools. For example, interaction with parents and carers (including family members at home or staff in boarding sections or residential provision) allows the collection or analysis of information regarding the training needs of students for setting appropriate personalised goals or targets for individual learning in priority areas. Staff who support students in making links with their communities or who provide respite care might also have essential information regarding the preferences of students in various circumstances. On the other hand, school staff will also be able to share information with home and residential staff, insights and developments made in relation to students' learning in school, for example, in terms of independence skills or crucial skills of various modes of communication. Students should be provided with a facilitating environment and opportunities for effective application of learned communication strategies to convey their needs, choices and preferences in various areas of their lives, including at home, in boarding sections/residential provision and in the community.

Students themselves can also provide important insights into their own learning and into the learning of their peers. Indeed, as students engage with deeper forms of learning and with self-regulation, it is important that they take greater responsibility for their own learning journey or trajectories. Staff in special schools can support these processes by sharing and negotiating targets for learning with students – objectives that students understand and own will be likely to be more engaging and motivating. Students can then be encouraged to monitor their own progress and performance in learning activities. Becoming aware of strategies that are successful compared with ways of working that generate barriers to learning can help students learn more effectively in future as well as develop important values and attitudes (for details of values and attitudes, see Chapter 3 "Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum"). As students make progress towards their objectives, they will be enabled to take account of their own attainments and the attainments of their peers. These forms of involvement can provide valuable insights into student learning for staff as well as positive outcomes in terms of learning to learn for students.

For reflection and action

- How does your school engage parents in the process of helping their children improve their learning? How can teachers, parents and students cooperate to enhance students' learning effectiveness?

- How does your school engage with students' family members in order to gain support for students' education and school activities?

4

4.6 Classroom Management and the Use of Resources and Equipment

Technology is evolving rapidly. The range of resources and equipment available to special schools in supporting student learning continues to expand exponentially. However, as this guide is centrally focused on curriculum and learning, the issues of classroom management and the use of resources and equipment will only be discussed briefly.

Special schools will already find themselves challenged to make most effective pedagogical use of new information and communication technologies and to make ever-increasing space available for the storage of equipment such as mobility aids, standing frames, benches, beds and chairs for students with physical and/or sensory impairments.

As stated in Chapter 2 "Curriculum Planning in Special Schools", issues of resource allocation and positioning and mobility need to be taken into account in short term or lesson planning. School staff should help students be comfortably positioned and able to access and interact both with items of equipment and resources and with other people involved in the planned activities. For some students with specific disabilities, this will mean, for example, that large TV screens need to be provided at appropriate heights; that high-quality sound to be generated at appropriate volumes; that personal computer or tablet screens to be located in very close proximity; that tables and chairs to be adjustable; or that table or tray space is devoted to objects used for communication.

In view of the lack of certain resources and equipment in the commercial market that can fully address the special needs of their students, some special schools devote a great deal of time, expertise and energy to developing purpose-designed items of equipment and teaching resources. There is no doubt that these resources can be of greater relevance to the students they are designed for than many items purchased from commercial suppliers.

Regarding the class sessions, the durations of standard teaching periods are inappropriate for many students in special schools. They will find it difficult to focus consistently throughout a 40-minute lesson; some students may be unable to sustain their attention, their states of awareness or their physical positions and levels of comfort beyond periods of time measured in minutes or even seconds. Staff in special schools will therefore often find it useful to break timetabled lessons up into sub-sections. This might mean, for example:

- providing an introduction to the themes and objectives of the lesson at the start for the whole class

- breaking up the main part of the lesson into a series of mini-lessons and activities

- adjusting the pace of the lesson in response to students' reactions in order to move more quickly, or more slowly, and to provide suitable periods of wait time

- creating time and opportunity within lessons to enable staff to change positions for students (perhaps from desks and chairs to sitting on the floor or from chairs into standing frames) and to promote mobility (perhaps by creating motivations for supported movement around the teaching environment)

- introducing different equipment or different technologies for different phases of the lesson

- dividing and sub-dividing the class into different groups for different sections of the lesson (for example, sometimes in mixed groups and sometimes in groups with similar prior attainments or communication preferences)

- offering a review of learning and a celebration of individual responses and attainments at the end of the lesson

For reflection and action

- How does your school ensure that the time available for learning is optimised for students?

- How does your school work to reduce or avoid prolonged waiting time for students?

- How does your school provide good quality time for students who need to engage in therapies and medical procedures, personal care activities and rest and recuperation?

4.7 Approaches to Life-wide Learning

Learning should go beyond the confines of the classroom, and the learning time[23] of students should refer to not only classroom periods as students can gain learning experiences anywhere and anytime for whole-person development. In light of this, life-wide learning is an effective strategy that moves student learning beyond the classroom and into other learning contexts. Through life-wide learning, teachers can extend the learning time and enable students to gain experiences that are difficult to acquire in ordinary classroom settings. Life-wide learning strategies can be integrated into the learning and teaching of KLAs, cross-curricular learning and co-curricular activities, so as to increase students' learning interests and engagement for self-directed learning and whole-person development.

---

[23] For further details of the notion of "learning time", please refer to the *Task Force on Review of School Curriculum Final Report* (2020) and the PECG (2024).

4

Life-wide learning emphasises experiential learning in real-life contexts and authentic settings. "Extending", "enabling" and "enriching" learning in this way can help students develop the lifelong learning capabilities they will need in their future lives in society. Special schools can help students acquire the five essential learning experiences and enhance the learning under different KLAs by providing life-wide learning opportunities through different contexts[24]. Life-wide learning can also provide ideal conditions for students to "consolidate" and apply their generic skills as well as life skills.

Different organisations and locations may offer a range of relevant learning opportunities and life-wide learning can take place in a range of different contexts outside school. These contexts include:

- the natural environment

- workplaces and industrial and commercial organisations

- the Internet, online platforms and mass media

- friendship and peer groupings in the community

- social, cultural, spiritual and religious organisations

- home and the wider family

For reflection and action

- Life-wide learning is a "learning-focused" strategy. In your school, how do you make use of different contexts for learning that extend well beyond formal lessons in the classroom?

Learning at home and in the family can help further extend and enrich the learning experiences of students in special schools. Where school staff and family members collaborate over agreed definition of priorities and targets for student learning (for example, in terms of personal targets set in the generic skills), progress made in school can be consolidated and extended at home. Family members may also be able to report to school staff significant new responses and behaviours they have witnessed at home and to suggest

---

[24] For details of different contexts for life-wide learning, please refer to Figure 7.2 in Booklet 7 of the SECG (2017) and Figure 8.2 in Chapter 8 of the PECG (2024).

new or extended targets for further learning. School staff and family members should work in close partnerships and communicate regularly and effectively in order to maximise the effectiveness of learning at home.

School staff and family members also need to collaborate over priorities for learning in the community. As part of curriculum planning, teachers in special schools should provide students with regular opportunities to experience a range of community settings. Schools may have programmes designed to familiarise students with a variety of community contexts, such as shops, parks, leisure facilities and entertainment venues. Schools should also teach students how to make safe and increasingly independent use of transport and travel infrastructures, including pedestrian paths and walkways, road crossings, buses, taxis and trains. Family members may wish to nominate personalised priorities for particular students and to help, in partnership with schools, their sons and daughters learn how to function safely and independently, for example, in specific parts of the city, in particular places of work or occupation, or on specific bus or MTR routes.

Learning at home and learning in the community will contribute significantly to the process of learning for life. Life-wide learning can provide students with opportunities to extend learning time into real life contexts, activities and experiences. This will, in turn, ensure that learning remains relevant to life beyond school and to the opportunities that adult life will bring.

With careful planning and thoughtful implementation, life-wide learning can also provide numerous good opportunities for student self-reflection. Student self-reflection can, in turn, enhance deep learning and help students develop as self-directed learners. Reflection does not have to involve writing. Students can be encouraged to recall and reflect upon their experience, learning and achievements through use of real objects and artefacts, photographs, videos, simulation and role play and through discussion with staff and with peers whether online or back in the classroom (see also Chapter 5 "Assessing Progress and Attainment").

> ### For reflection and action
>
> ● How does your school make use of the community and community-based resources in order to facilitate student learning?
>
> ● How does your school strengthen the provision of life-wide learning experiences in the face of limited resources and other constraints (e.g. constraints in real-life environments)?

Chapter 5

Assessing Progress and Attainment

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

Contents

Chapter 5
Assessing Progress and Attainment

Page

This is one of the 7 chapters in the *Curriculum Guide for Special Schools.*
Its contents are as follows:

5

Assessing Progress and Attainment

5.1 Assessment for a Range of Purposes

Assessment in special schools can be used for a range of purposes. For example, assessment can be used to identify any special educational needs that a student may have. This **identification** of difficulties will lead to provision of appropriate support for students, e.g. some students will be recommended for separate teaching, or other forms of specialist provision within special schools.

Assessment can be used to make a more detailed and focused **diagnosis** of a student's difficulties. In this process, a student's difficulties in learning are scrutinised and classified so that appropriate remedial help and guidance can be provided. This diagnostic function may result, for example, in the recognition of a student's specific learning difficulties or attention control problems and these diagnoses may lead to the determination of specialist interventions.

Assessment can be used to provide a summary of what a student has learned, for example, at the end of a school year or at a point of transition such as between the primary and secondary phases of education. This **summative** function is usually associated with the recording of the overall achievement of a student in a systematic way and the preparation of reports about the progress that a student has made in his/her learning up to a specific point in time. For students who are following an ordinary curriculum in special schools, external formal tests or public examinations may be used as part of summative assessment.

Assessment can be used to inform future planning of learning and teaching, for example, helping teachers and students decide on future objectives for learning or revisions to planned learning opportunities. In **formative** assessment, which serves two major purposes, namely "Assessment for Learning" and "Assessment as Learning"[25], the positive achievements of a student are recognised and discussed and the appropriate next learning steps are planned. This formative function can operate at a number of levels, from the everyday adjustment of learning and teaching strategies that experienced teachers carry out continually to more formal review and revision of curriculum plans or schemes of work for a subject.

---

[25] For more details regarding "Assessment for Learning" and "Assessment as Learning", please refer to Booklet 4 of the SECG (2017) and Chapter 5 of the PECG (2024).

Assessment can also be used as part of the curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation cycle. This **evaluative** function enables aspects of the work of a class, a subject team, a school or other educational services to be monitored in order to inform review or reporting. At a school level, assessment information can be used to drive the review, revision and improvement of plans for learning and teaching in terms of objectives, content, learning activities and pedagogy.

This chapter of the guide focuses chiefly on the functions of assessment that relate to the curriculum, i.e. **summative, formative and evaluative** functions. This chapter does not set out to provide advice on the identification of special educational needs or on the diagnosis of specific difficulties in learning. This chapter will focus significantly on the assessment of students' progress and attainment in relation to the subjects of the central curriculum. However, much of the guidance provided here will also apply to assessment of other learning aspects in special schools, including the assessment of students' progress in relation to generic skills, towards individual targets for learning, and with regard to important aspects of the school-based curriculum.

> ### For reflection and action
>
> ● As a teacher, how do you know that your students are learning? How do you record students' attainments and other outcomes of learning?

5.2 A Spectrum of Forms of Assessment

Under the principle of "one curriculum framework for all", special schools teach the subjects under different Key Learning Areas of the central curriculum. Besides, special schools can offer a number of related but different learning elements in the school-based curriculum. In some special schools, for example, the curriculum might focus significantly on the teaching of generic skills such as communication skills or information technology skills. In many special schools, the curriculum might also focus significantly on developing practical capabilities, such as self-care skills and skills for independent living. This chapter will explore different forms of assessment and how students' attainments and progresses can be recognised.

Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs)

In order to support the assessment of progress and attainments in relation to certain subjects of the central curriculum for students with intellectual disability, the *Learning Progression Frameworks for Students with Intellectual Disabilities* have been developed and made available to special schools. The LPFs cover a range of attainments from the earliest levels of subject awareness through to outcomes that may be similar to attainments seen among students in ordinary schools. The LPFs will therefore provide relevant reference points in a wider range of specialist settings where students are studying these subjects of the central curriculum and making progress that is below typical age-related expectations.

5

By making reference to the supplementary guides of the subjects of the central curriculum for students with intellectual disability, the LPFs describe the critical attainments or "milestones" of learning for students with reference to the related subjects. They provide an important reference for making judgements about the outcomes that students have achieved over time and also offer information that can help teachers improve curriculum planning as well as learning and teaching in future.

School-based Assessments

The LPFs only covers the key learning outcomes of certain subjects and do not provide a full picture of students' learning outcomes across the whole curriculum, teachers therefore need to identify attainments that are not listed in the LPFs by other means. School staff should use the LPFs together with school-based assessments and, where appropriate, students' individualised education programmes (IEPs) in order to extend their understanding of students' wider learning attainments and progress. Staff will need to rely on school-based assessment to reveal students' learning achievements in areas that are not represented in the LPFs, including other subjects, generic skills and areas of learning that supplement the subjects of the central curriculum. This might include the development of student learning portfolios designed to demonstrate students' whole-person development and achievements.

Assessments Across a Wide Spectrum

Teachers in special schools should be used to carrying out assessments across a wide spectrum of possibilities. As noted in Section 5.1, assessment in special schools has a **formative function** (assessment to inform future learning, i.e. "assessment for learning" and "assessment as learning") as well as a **summative function** (assessment to establish the current level of attainment, i.e. "assessment of learning"). These forms of assessment can be used effectively in relation to students' learning progress in the curriculum because they can be linked to externally determined frameworks for measuring progress, whether these comprise agreed criteria (such as those given in the LPFs – **criterion-referenced assessment**) or agreed standards of expected attainment (such as the measures of progress or norms established in relation to standard tests or public examinations – **norm-referenced assessment**).

Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced assessments are not the only options available in special schools. Assessment of progress in relation to individual targets or priorities for learning can also be ipsative or self-referential. **Ipsative assessment**[26] simply compares

---

[26] Refer to Tina Isaacs et al., *Key Concepts in Educational Assessment.* (London: Sage Books, 2013), pp.80-82.

current performance with an individual student's previous attainments. Where individual programmes of learning are used, for example, in the form of individualised education programme (IEP), ipsative assessment of a student's "personal best" effort to date is likely to be most appropriate. This form of assessment mainly concerns the distance travelled on a personal learning journey by the individual student since the previous assessment; externally determined criteria and the attainments of other students are not relevant.

Individualised education programmes (IEPs) and ipsative assessments generally focus on a small collection of short term targets or priorities for learning designed to meet the specific needs of an individual student. These plans and assessments are highly personalised and may concern, for example, targets set in relation to generic skills and other essential skills (as introduced in Chapter 2, Section 2.4 "Setting Objectives for Learning") that are additional to and different from the objectives for learning that apply to groups or cohorts of students following a shared curriculum.

In contrast, at the further end of the assessment spectrum, some students in special schools follow a curriculum that is essentially the same as their age peers in ordinary schools. In order to help provide these students with equivalence of opportunity in their lives beyond school, it is appropriate that they sit for the same standardised tests and examinations as students in ordinary schools do. Teachers are encouraged to follow the procedures set out for entering students for public examinations, but also to make full and sympathetic use of the examination accommodations and special arrangements that are available for students with special educational needs, including the use, for example, of extra time or specialist equipment and resources.

The spectrum of assessments in special schools is summarised in Figure 5.1 below. Most assessment activities in special schools will lie between the positions of personalised or ipsative assessment and norm-referenced and standardised assessment. The remainder of this chapter looks at the assessment practices and principles that are most likely to be of use in special schools, continuing with the theme of overcoming barriers to assessment.

Figure 5.1 A Wide Spectrum of Assessments in Special Schools

Ipsative Assessment   Criterion-referenced Assessment   Norm-referenced Assessment

5
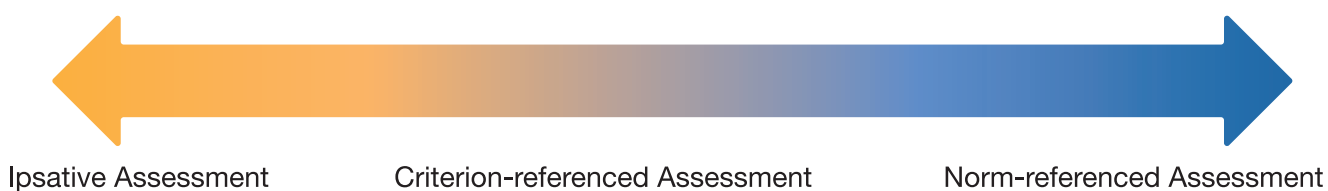
> ### For reflection and action
>
> ● How does curriculum planning in your school help you align modes of assessment with objectives for learning?

5.3 How Can Barriers to Assessment be Overcome?

Students in special schools may experience different levels of difficulty in their learning. However, the approach of school staff in making assessments of any kind should remain positive. Teachers should be looking for evidence of what students "can do" rather than trying to identify what they have not yet learned. The process of "testing" students to the point of failure will put up further barriers to their learning. Therefore, it should be reiterated that the key task for teachers is to promote progress as well as to identify and reward success.

In addition to their difficulties in learning, many students in special schools experience other impairments that present barriers to the demonstration of particular forms of attainment. These impairments may be sensory, physical, emotional or social. Examples in the context of Chinese Language include:

● difficulties in visually decoding text ("reading") for students with a visual impairment

● difficulties in hearing spoken words ("listening") for students with a hearing impairment

● difficulties in the mechanics of making marks ("writing") for students with impaired eye-hand co-ordination

● difficulties in articulating sounds ("speaking") for students with physical disabilities or speech and language impairment

Students' impairments do not necessarily present barriers to the demonstration of attainment nor to teachers' judgements. As in tests or examinations, **students should be allowed to use assistive technologies, alternative and augmentative systems, and/or reasonable support and assistance where appropriate in order to enable them to demonstrate their attainments.**

In the light of their impairments, teachers may **exempt individual students from demonstrating attainment in relation to certain learning outcomes while still recognising the progress they have made.**

In order to overcome barriers to learning, teachers should be confident in **offering students learning activities that are different from, but equivalent to, those set out in the central curriculum and in assessment materials.** These different but equivalent activities can help promote student engagement and learning effectiveness when they are accessible to students and when they capitalise on students' interests and preferences. Teachers can use the outcomes of these different but equivalent activities as evidence of learning when making assessments.

Barriers to learning can also sometimes be overcome by **providing prompting or support.** Most attainments represented in the central curriculum require students to accomplish tasks without direct help or support, although the materials may not explicitly state that the task should be accomplished independently. However, prompted or supported learning may provide a useful transition for many students between work they find too challenging and independent attainment. Further, some learning outcomes in the central curriculum may involve students working with instructions or guidance from teachers or the support or combined efforts of peers. For example, some activities in the curriculum for Chinese Language involve writing that is "guided" by a more experienced partner while some activities in other subjects require students to work collaboratively. In the case of learning outcomes like these, teachers can make assessments on the basis of work done with the forms of prompting or support specified or that are equivalent to those set out in the documents relating to the central curriculum. Teachers may talk to their colleagues about the levels and forms of support that are acceptable when measuring progress in relation to specific outcomes or discuss these issues with colleagues from other schools.

As they work towards other more challenging learning outcomes, students may still require support in order to make responses, to participate in activities or to complete tasks. In these instances, staff should offer support and at the same time work towards enabling students to demonstrate these attainments without assistance. School staff need to be keenly aware of the distinctions between constructive prompting (which could be described as providing the minimum support that facilitates learning and the demonstration of attainment) and unnecessary interference (which is in the form of "helping" that creates a barrier to learning, discourages independent activity and invalidates attainment).

At the earliest levels of response and attainment (for example, for students with severe intellectual disability), access to any form of learning activity may require guided participation. These students may move through stages in a continuum of awareness, support and prompting until they can be said to be actively participating. Making judgements about assessing students on this continuum of possibilities, and deciding when to start fading levels of prompting, will depend on the teacher's or the activity partner's sense of when students are moving from resistance, through co-operation, towards initiation of activity or response. As in other areas of learning, it will be important to continue to provide prompting in order to maintain the positive stimulus of guided participation, as well as be ready to reduce levels of prompting as soon as there is a sense of the student beginning to make independent responses.

5

Students with more significant difficulties in learning may need long periods of time to generate responses, but any signs of initiation should be rewarded immediately with positive feedback and praise. Working in these ways requires sensitivity and subtle judgements and the goal for staff should always be to build autonomy, choice and self-determination for students. In terms of assessment, teachers may need support, for example, through discussion at assessment and moderation meetings, in making interpretations of reflex reactions versus active or co-active exploration.

Whatever the form of prompting used, teachers should note down the levels and forms of support required to enable students to attain. Future teaching can then be planned in such a way as to promote greater independence for students, and teachers can be ready to recognise progress when students learn to complete tasks with less prompting or less significant forms of support. Reductions in the levels of prompting or support needed by students in making their responses (at whatever level) will be likely to provide evidence that these students are moving towards the attainment of new or more secure learning outcomes.

For reflection and action

- How does your school ensure that students are not denied attainments simply because they give their responses using different modes of expression?

- What strategies do you use to enable students to demonstrate their learning? How do you record the support measures and resources that are used to facilitate learning outcomes?

5.4 What Forms of Evidence Should Teachers Recognise?

Assessments and judgements about attainment, in relation to the subjects of the central curriculum, should be supported by evidence, and that evidence can take a number of different forms. Teachers normally want to be sure that they have observed evidence of learning on more than one occasion. Teachers can therefore gather evidence from different sources, for example:

- annotated samples of a student's work (whether these are digital, on paper or presented as artefacts)

- photographs, video or audio recordings of students responding in particular ways

- staff records or notes based on observations of student behaviour in learning activities online, in the classroom or during daily activities outside the classroom

- students' self reports and/or peer reviews

- anecdotal accounts from outside school recording practical performances or responses

It is important to note that records can be multimodal, and record keeping and assessment can often be carried out most effectively in the context of ordinary day-to-day learning activities – in formative assessment, and in relation to the central curriculum. Generally, there is no need to separate teaching and assessment, or to set up separate assessment tasks or tests/examinations, especially when standard tests or assessment activities are inaccessible due to students' learning difficulties.

There is therefore a key role for teacher observation and judgement when keeping records relating to the attainments of students in special schools. Further, record keeping and assessment can be greatly enhanced by the involvement in these processes of other members of staff, family members and the students themselves. This means that teachers may make their own records of observations or they may collect the descriptions, comments/commentaries or "witness statements" from other people who have observed certain responses. These contributors may include:

- other teachers

- teacher assistants

- speech therapists

- physiotherapists

- occupational therapists

- parents

- siblings

- classmates and peers

- other relevant individuals

Evidence should also be derived from everyday learning and teaching activities, such as project work, a classroom quiz or a practical activity. In fact, the context in which learning occurs can have a significant impact on student performance and behaviour. Lack of experience, limited learning opportunity, low expectations and inappropriately differentiated teaching can all present barriers to learning and prevent students from realising their potential. Besides, students will be unlikely to learn and to demonstrate their attainments when they are under the pressure of an unfamiliar or formal setting working with an adult who is not known to them. Equally, a student who is able to repeat responses in a familiar setting with a trusted member of staff may be reluctant to offer similar responses in different

5

situations with unfamiliar people. For many students in special schools, the ability to transfer or generalise learning into new contexts represents, in itself, significant attainment.

For more accurate and comprehensive judgments of students' attainment, teachers should therefore take full account of responses that occur outside subject lessons and outside the classroom. Some learning outcomes require students to apply their learning in new settings, so reports of student responses and behaviours at home, in the community, in Applied Learning courses and in other learning experiences and activities will often be particularly relevant. Arguably, settings outside the classroom will offer the best opportunities to make judgements about the application of communication skills, literacy skills or numeracy skills.

Collecting learning evidence should be manageable and avoid duplication and bureaucracy. When making teacher assessments, there is **no need to:**

● collect numerous forms of repetitious evidence to support each judgement – staff observation records, comments and witness statements can stand alone as evidence

● collect evidence from every lesson or illustrate every increment of progress – staff should focus on collecting clear evidence and making brief, telling annotations in relation to significant attainments or landmarks in students' learning

● set up separate assessment tasks/activities, use tests or set up arbitrary rules, criteria or conditions when making assessments – teachers can use observation records and materials collected during learning activities as an evidence base

However, it is inappropriate and unreliable to award a level to a student on the basis of observing a single learning event. Evidence of learning builds up over time and in a range of contexts and teachers should use their professional judgement to decide, on the basis of significant evidence gathered during a series of learning opportunities and in different settings, when a student has made secure progress to a new level. Very often, teachers may compare evidence of learning in relation to learning outcomes across a cluster of levels for their students.

Whatever the nature of the evidence gathered by teachers, it should be supported with annotations giving contextual information. Dates on pieces of work can reveal trends and rates of progress, but good annotation involves more than merely dating work. Examples of relevant contextual information include:

● the date and time of the response and the learning outcome to which it is relevant

- the setting in which the response occurred, for example, online, in a subject lesson, in the community and at home

- the people who were with the student at the time, for example, a therapist or teacher assistant or a group of peers, and the resources being used

- whether the response is "new" (the first time a response has occurred) or "emerging" (a response that is happening more often but that is not reliable) or "established" (a response that a student usually offers in a certain set of circumstances)

- the levels of guidance, support or prompting required to enable the student to make the response (for example, a model to copy, verbal reminders or physical prompts)

- whether assistive technologies and alternative or augmentative systems (reasonable assistance) are used

- any adaptations or amendments teachers have made (for example, by recording unusual or individual examples of performance) in order to enable their students to demonstrate their progress

Providing staff with annotation sheets of learning evidence in an agreed format will make the annotation process more efficient and useful. Some approaches involve various members of staff simply writing their comments onto samples of work. Where students are working at earlier levels, staff may append a dated set of notes onto a photograph of a student responding in a new and significant way.

Teachers should discuss their assessment decisions with colleagues within their school, showing their evidence and annotations to other members of staff so that the latter can either confirm their judgements or guide them towards more accurate judgements using their own experience. Later, teachers may be invited to discuss their assessments with colleagues from other schools by sharing their records including evidence and annotations and justifying their reasons for recognising attainment at a given level. Annotation of evidence plays a crucial role in facilitating dialogue about assessment.

For reflection and action

- Think about all the different ways in which assessments happen in your school. How do these different practices enable all students to demonstrate their learning and attainments?

- What information should be included when designing annotation sheets for your school? What annotations would help you in the process of assessing students' learning performance and progress? Discuss and agree on these matters with colleagues.

5

5.5 Who Can Contribute Towards Assessment?

While teachers are responsible for making assessment judgements, many people can contribute to the collection of evidence that supports these judgements. Indeed, dialogue is crucial to the process of making judgements about attainments for students in special schools and teachers should avoid making assessment judgements in isolation.

Teachers in special schools are used to working in a variety of forms of partnership. Staff can use these existing partnerships to inform conversations about learning and assessment. Contributions from the whole classroom team, including teachers, therapists, teacher assistants and other professionals, are valuable. Staff often share their thoughts about the emerging attainments they see in students' everyday work. Sometimes these discussions will highlight the need to collect a particular piece of work as evidence or to make a note of a particular response in a student's record.

Classroom support staff, including teacher assistants and volunteers, can often offer valuable insights into the responses made by students on a day-to-day basis. Teachers should encourage these colleagues to share their thoughts about the emerging attainments they see in students' everyday work and their perceptions about any aspects of the learning and teaching context that might be hindering/slowing progress rather than facilitating it. Shared reflections, collaborative processes of review and record-keeping practices that welcome contributions from all the members of the classroom team can help teachers secure accurate and valid assessment judgements.

Dialogue with other professionals can often confirm the significance, in terms of attainment, of students' responses as observed over time and in a range of contexts. Teachers can improve the quality of their assessments when they work closely with therapists, psychologists or sensory support staff to review and reflect upon students' learning or to evaluate the meaning of the responses that students make.

An exchange of views with staff from residential or respite settings or who work with students on community links can often inform assessment judgements in similar ways. Discussion with parents, carers and family members about learning at home can also enhance the effectiveness of the assessment processes. Discussing progress with people who know the student in a wide range of settings can help inform assessment and resolve uncertainties over assessment judgements by providing evidence of the application of learning in contexts beyond the classroom.

Discussion with students can also enrich the assessment process and its meaning. Experience

in the special schools demonstrates that all students can be meaningfully involved in such discussions in some way. The feedback they give, using their preferred method of communication, as they review and think about their own performances or the attainments of their peers can yield valuable evidence of progress. In turn, involving students in self or peer assessment can help them become more aware of their own learning.

Discussing their own progress or the responses of their fellow students with teachers can help students appreciate what is expected of them. Listening to and observing students can reveal what they found easy, the factors that cause difficulties or barriers to learning, and the extent to which they need to consolidate or generalise skills. It can also show if students are approaching attainments at a higher level.

For reflection and action

- How can space and time be made available in your school to enable teachers to collaborate with one another and with teacher assistants, therapists and other professionals to complete shared assessment?

- What strategies do you use, as a teacher, to help you understand the perceptions and points of view of your students?

5.6 Assessing Different Aspects of Student Progress

Teachers should make their assessment judgements using a "best-fit" approach. There is no need to "atomise" the criteria given in external rubrics or in school-based assessment materials, checking students' learning against each element, or to "quantify" attainment, ensuring that students display some fixed proportion of the behaviours within a description of learning performance. The "best fit" approach means that students do not have to achieve all the elements of a description of performance at a given level in order to attain that level. Many students will give responses that characterise learning at clusters of levels above or below those of their main attainments.

It follows that students will often display uneven or "spikey" profiles in their learning across different aspects of the curriculum (including subjects and strands within subjects). There are no expectations of "typical" rates of progress within a subject or of learning that is consistently within a level across subjects or across strands. Students will often therefore have profiles of learning that include attainment of learning outcomes across a range of levels, across subjects, and across strands within subjects.

Staff will often be able to identify both linear and lateral progress when assessing outcomes for students in special schools. Broadly this means:

- linear progress through ever higher levels of attainment

- lateral progress across a range of learning experiences at a similar level

Linear progress can be identified when students display new behaviours, make fresh responses or gain new skills and understanding. Linear progress can be assessed, over time, when students attain at incrementally higher levels (when a student progresses, over two or three years, from earlier levels to higher levels of learning, for example). Linear progress in relation to the subjects of the central curriculum can be thought of as representing new learning within a subject area.

For many students with difficulties in learning, progress within or across levels of attainment can be as important as progress to higher levels. **Lateral progress** can be identified when students use related skills at similar levels in different contexts or show consistent responses or forms of understanding in different subjects. This is sometimes referred to as generalising learning. Lateral progress can be assessed between the subjects of the central curriculum (when a student indicates "big" and "small" objects consistently in Mathematics lessons and in Visual Arts lessons, for example) or within subjects (when a student responds consistently to loud and soft sounds played on different instruments in Music lessons, for example). Lateral progress in terms of generic skills can also be assessed when students demonstrate the skills and understandings they have gained in one area of learning in other contexts.

It is important for staff in special schools to provide, in their planning, students with opportunities to apply emerging skills in a wide range of contexts. It will be useful to record how students give different or similar responses in different situations. This may enable teachers to assess the extent to which students generalise their learning in different settings and contexts. In this way, students can be encouraged to develop more even profiles of attainment across the curriculum as they consolidate, strengthen, refine and apply their learning in new settings. Staff can then acknowledge the lateral progress students make when they extend their range of learning experiences, make equivalent responses in a range of subject settings or use pre-existing skills in new contexts.

To show students' learning progress, looking for evidence of learning across the subjects will therefore be important. A smooth profile of attainment at similar levels in different subjects may be a significant indication of lateral progress. At the same time, strong linear progress through levels of learning in one particular subject area may indicate an aptitude or a preference for a particular subject or area of learning that may become relevant as the student gains new attainments. In short, staff should be alert to both kinds of progress.

- In what ways are your students encouraged to apply and consolidate their learning across the curriculum?

- How is assessment information shared between staff members (for example, teachers of different subjects) in your school?

5.7 How Can the Outcomes of Assessment be Used?

Assessment for Learning and Assessment as Learning

The key purpose of formative assessment is to inform learning and teaching and promote further learning. Gathering and annotating a broad range of items of evidence of learning will help teachers identify the strengths, abilities, needs and interests of individual students and the conditions that facilitate further progress and attainment.

Teachers may also exchange information about students' attainments and the progress they have made with their colleagues. Teachers should share the outcomes of their assessments:

- as reference with staff who teach their students different subjects

- to help another teacher set work at an appropriate level for a student they have taught

- at points of transition (for example, when students move to a new year group or a new key stage, or leave school)

Moreover, teachers can use assessment information to review progress with students. Students will benefit from being involved in self-assessment and self-review. Teachers should discuss progress and attainment with students where appropriate because:

- involving students in self-review helps them reflect upon the processes of learning and therefore helps them become better learners

- inviting students to review their learning encourages them to repeat and consolidate important skills, responses or behaviours

- involving students in the development of their own learning portfolios/profiles can motivate them to learn, and

- reviewing learning with students can give staff insights into the stability of recently acquired learning and how the students interpret it or connect it to other aspects of their prior knowledge

5

The assessment judgements arrived at by teachers can provide a focus for dialogue with students about the progress they are making. Talking with students about their work can help teachers refine their thoughts about the progress students have made and provide fresh insights into learning and attainment.

Knowing how to recognise attainment can also help students move their learning forward. Of course, teachers will need to recognise and celebrate aspects of progress, both in relation to the subjects and in terms of students' wider experiences and achievements. Students also wish to review their most recent achievements in areas where they regard learning as being highly relevant and important, for example, in relation to ipsative assessment and their personal targets.

For reflection and action

- How is information about student attainment shared between staff in your school?

- How do you inform students about the criteria used to assess their learning and how are they involved in the assessment process?

As well as using assessment data to inform individual learning, school staff can also make broader use of assessment data to enhance learning and teaching and to drive school improvement, which will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Using Aggregated Data to Enhance Learning and Teaching

The development of digital approaches to the management of data (including assessment data) is being actively pursued in many special schools. This kind of development has great potential to impact upon school improvement in future. For example, some school leaders may make use of data drawn from assessments made using the LPFs in their schools in order to inform learning and teaching and wider planning. These initiatives have demonstrated that data can play a useful part in school improvement and this section will explore those possibilities.

Previous material in this chapter has confirmed that gathering evidence of student attainment can drive the ongoing and formative assessment of student learning together with the reporting of learning outcomes and summative accounts of student progress. Moreover,

assessment plays a major role in the ongoing cycle of curriculum planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review, and the management and analysis of assessment data can inform curriculum plans at a number of levels, for example:

● improvements in learning and teaching on micro, meso and macro levels

● the review of the curriculum itself, including long, medium and short term planning

● the evaluation and review of the effectiveness of school provision

Using attainment data in these ways can help curriculum leaders, subject panel heads and teachers raise their expectations in relation to future student learning. For example, implementing the LPFs can encourage teachers to increase the challenge in their planned activities and help them promote students' further learning at higher levels.
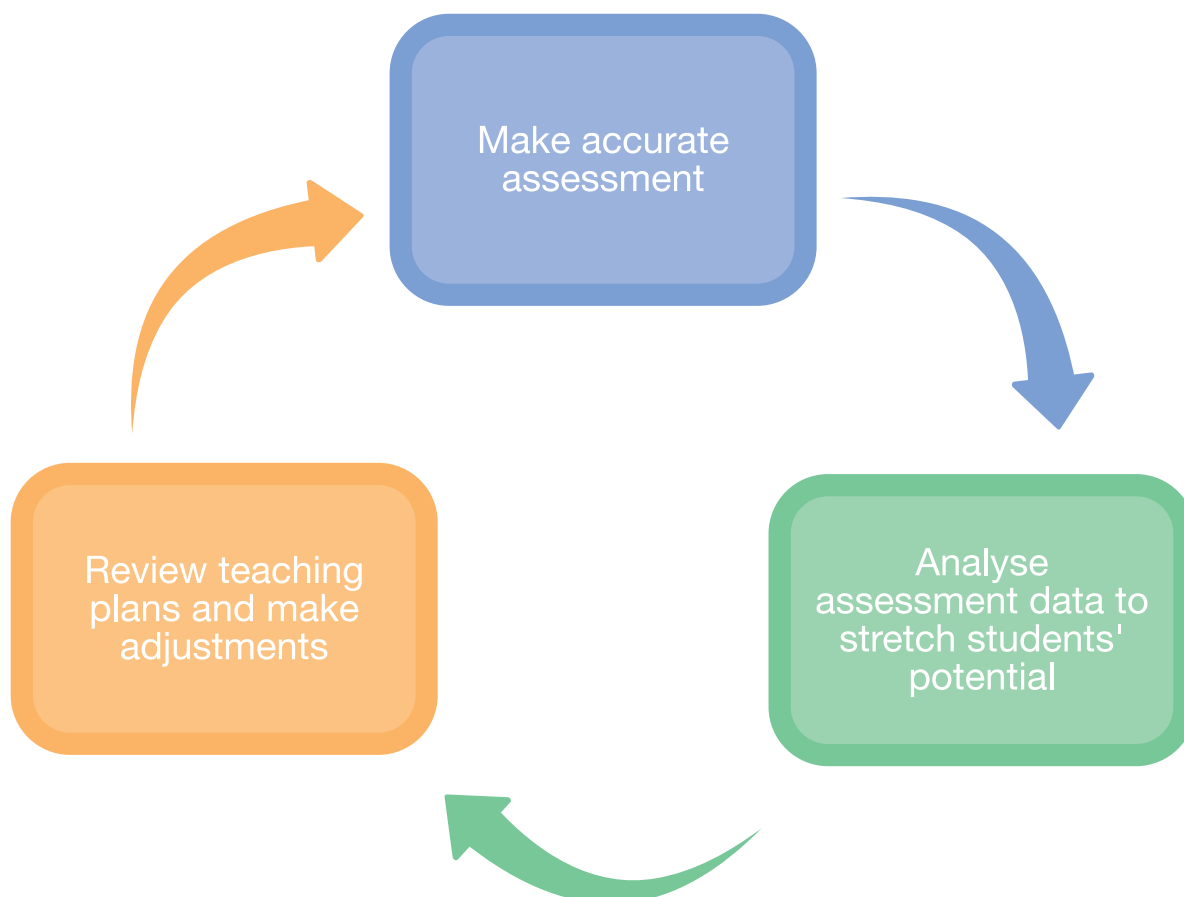
Using Aggregated Data for Improvement in Learning and Teaching on Micro Level

Making accurate assessments can, in some instances, result in teachers raising their expectations of students. Planned lessons and activities sometimes do not challenge students enough and do not allow them to demonstrate higher-level attainments. Teachers may then have diminished horizons for students. Balanced and equitable assessments can help teachers identify and rectify lowered expectations, inadequate challenges and under-achievement.

Looking at assessments and attainment data can help teachers plan lessons that provide greater challenge in the activities offered to students (for example, by reducing teacher instruction and increasing levels of independent activity and learning). Therefore, assessment can, through review and formative processes, help teachers raise attainment as well as inform learning and teaching.

Working in this way enables individual teachers to review and refine their own teaching plans, for example, for lessons scheduled to take place in the days and weeks ahead, making adjustments in the light of what they know students have learned in previous lessons. The major roles and process of using assessment data in improving learning and teaching on micro level is summarised in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 Using Assessment Data to Improve Learning and Teaching — **Micro Level**

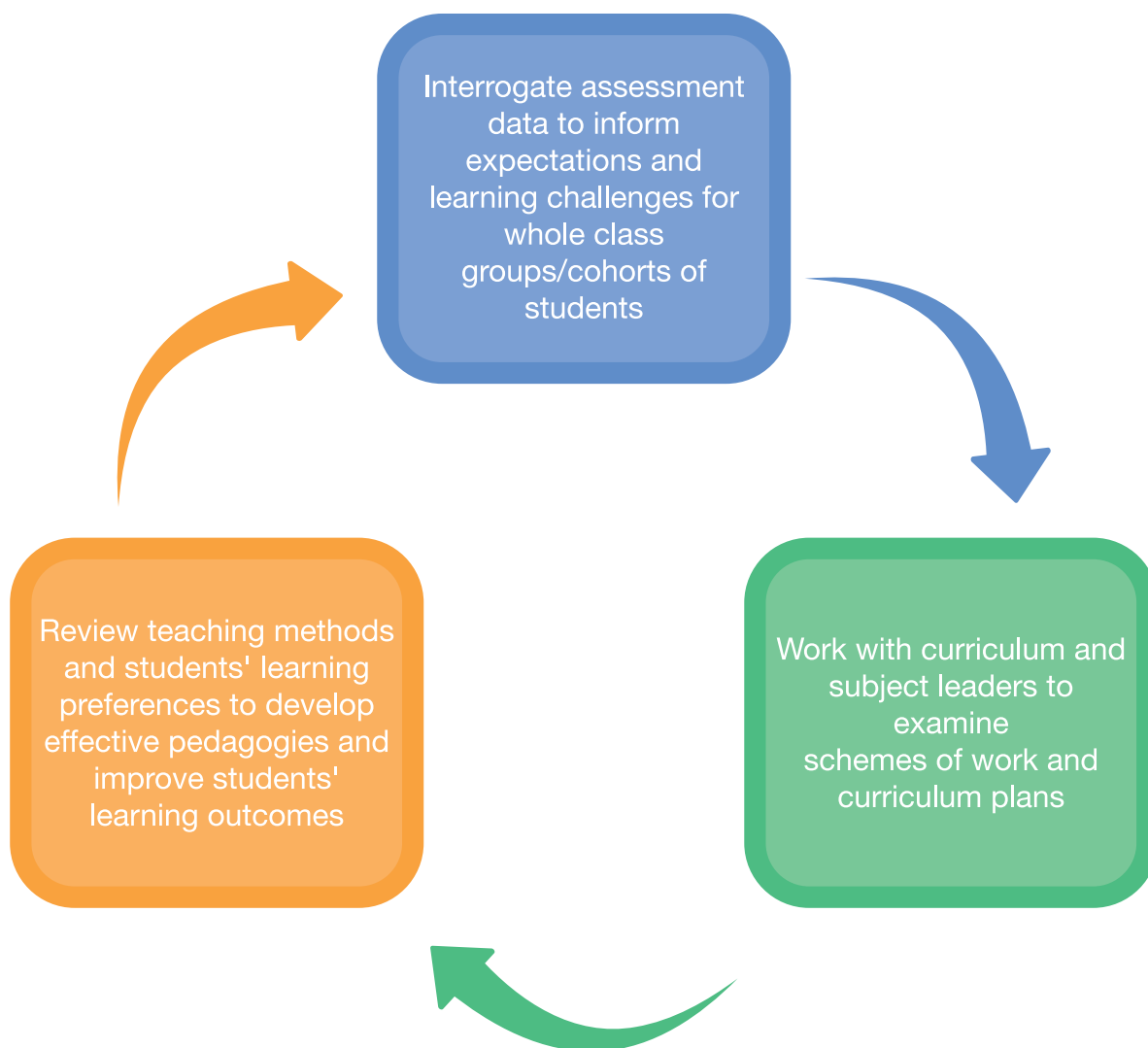## Using Aggregated Data for Improvement in Learning and Teaching on Meso Level

Moving beyond the micro level of learning, making intelligent use of attainment data can help teachers plan lessons that more consistently involve greater challenge in the activities offered to individual students as well as groups of students.

At the meso level, interrogating aggregated attainment data can inform broader questions about expectations and learning challenges for whole class groups or cohorts of students. To address these questions, it will be appropriate for class or subject teachers to work closely with subject panel heads and curriculum co-ordinators to examine schemes of work and curriculum plans for students in particular year groups or key stages with a view to tailoring the degree of challenge in a module or unit of work to the needs of groups of students. Curriculum and subject leaders can therefore work with subject teachers to use assessment information in the broader review of schemes of work and long term plans for subject teaching.

Part of this process of review has, in many schools, led to revision and improvement of approaches to learning and teaching. Assessment information helps teachers realise that teaching methods and learning preferences can have a significant influence on attainment and, in many schools, the development of enhanced and innovative pedagogies has led to improved learning outcomes for students.

Figure 5.3 shows the major roles and process of using assessment data in improving learning and teaching on meso level.

Figure 5.3 Using Assessment Data to Improve Learning and Teaching — **Meso Level**

Interrogate assessment data to inform expectations and learning challenges for whole class groups/cohorts of students

Work with curriculum and subject leaders to examine schemes of work and curriculum plans

Review teaching methods and students' learning preferences to develop effective pedagogies and improve students' learning outcomes

5

Using Aggregated Data to Drive School Improvement

Attainment data can also inform wider discussions about balance in the whole curriculum at a whole school level.

Using Aggregated Data for Improvement in Learning and Teaching on Macro Level

At the macro level, senior staff in special schools will be able to use aggregated whole school attainment data to work with curriculum co-ordinators and subject leaders in order to drive forward wider school improvements by subjecting aspects of the curriculum to review, revision and enhancement. At this level, it may be possible to see patterns in the data such as relationships between attainment and gender, or specific impairments, or the social or cultural backgrounds of students. Schools will wish to ensure that there are equal opportunities for students from any background to demonstrate their learning. In this way, frameworks for assessment like the LPFs may not only be used to measure attainment but, by encouraging school staff to review their plans for teaching, may actively help teachers raise attainments across the whole school.

Developing this aspect of the use of the LPFs will be of direct relevance and interest to school leaders and other stakeholders (including professionals from outside school). Curriculum leaders and subject panel heads clearly also have major roles to play in these kinds of initiatives. However, **becoming involved in these processes of curriculum review and the systematic evaluation of learning and teaching will benefit all teachers,** enabling them, for example, to build a reliable view of progression in their subject and to see how their teaching contributes to logical sequences of learning for students.

The assessment process can therefore encourage teachers to collaborate, for example:

- when discussing student attainments with colleagues (including fellow teachers and other professionals) within the classroom

- through processes of curriculum review and subject planning in subject panels and curriculum teams in their schools

- in association with moderation meetings/activities between schools, when student attainments are reviewed, scrutinised and discussed in collaboration with colleagues from other schools and in relation to processes of curriculum planning

Key staff and other stakeholders in special schools should therefore explore how data on student attainment and other forms of data can play a powerful role in facilitating wider
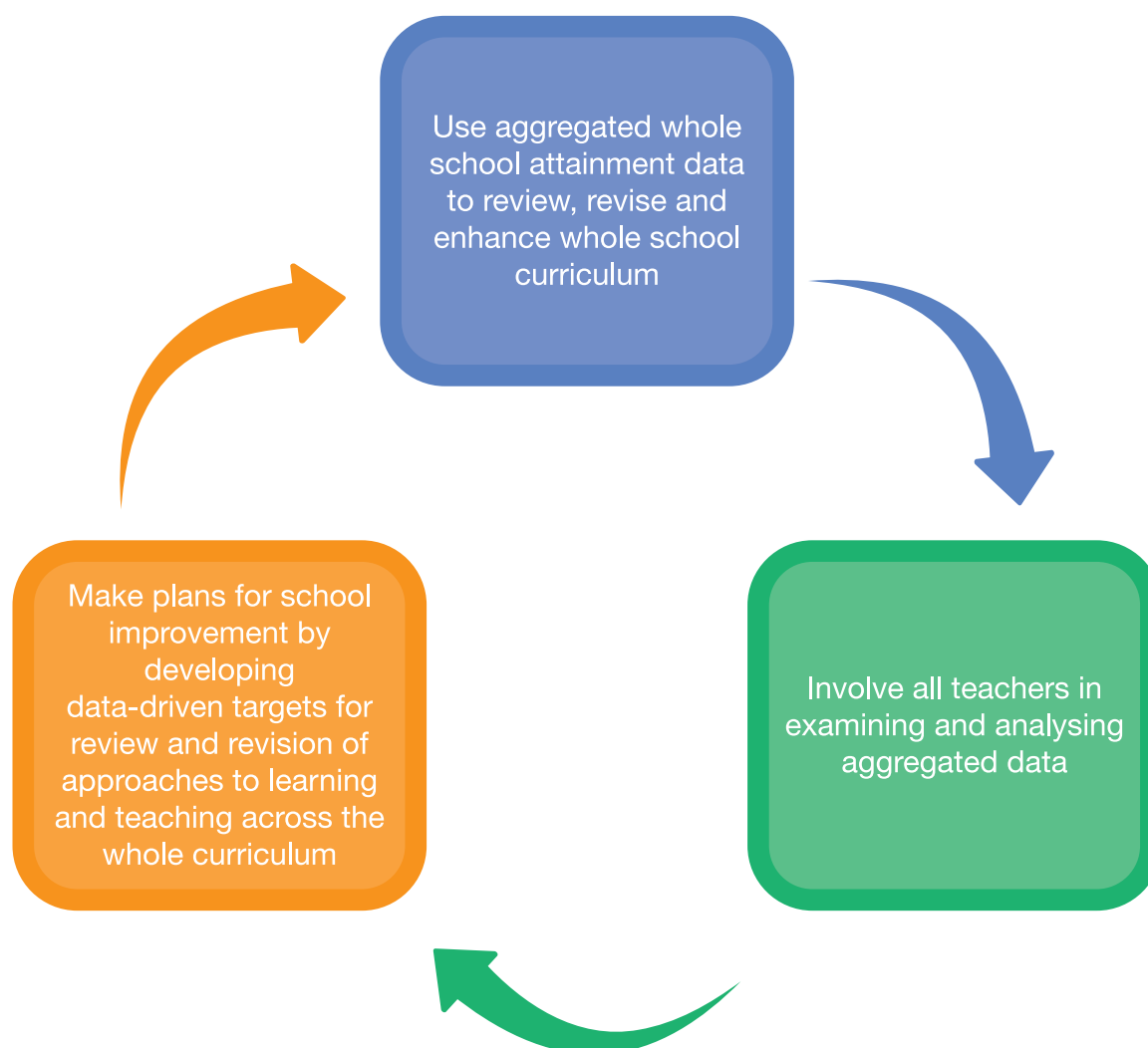
processes in school development and school improvement. The digital management of data might then contribute to a number of outcomes, for example:

- Reports of the attainments of individual students may be passed to the students and their families in order to support them in gaining access to post-school provision (including services related to employment);

- Schools may make use of their own school data, in aggregated form and without identifying any particular students, in order to identify areas in which learning and teaching or other aspects of student well-being need to be improved and thus to inform planning for school development;

- Schools may agree to share anonymised data in order to build up a broader picture, over time, of the attainments of students in special schools, for example, across the schools managed by one sponsoring body or across schools catering for specific categories of student need; and

- Ultimately, without identifying any particular students or schools, it may become possible to make an aggregated and anonymised extract of territory-wide attainment data available to senior leaders in the special schools in Hong Kong on an annual basis in order to support informed school improvement planning.

The LPFs and other agreed frameworks for assessment therefore provide an opportunity to aggregate data about attainments in the special schools in Hong Kong on a territory-wide basis and to make use of such data for school improvement purposes. However, it is critical to ensure through rigorous review and moderation among schools that there is full confidence in data generated through teacher assessment. It is also important to note that data should not be used in order to make invidious and invalid comparisons between schools. Most importantly, where schools are able to use their own data sets to drive internal processes of school improvement in relation to a wider picture of attainment, the outcomes are very positive.

Figure 5.4 summarises the major roles and process of using assessment data in improving learning and teaching (driving improvement in school curriculum) on macro level.

Figure 5.4 Using Assessment Data to Improve Learning and Teaching (Driving Improvement in School Curriculum) — **Macro Level**

Use aggregated whole school attainment data to review, revise and enhance whole school curriculum

Involve all teachers in examining and analysing aggregated data

Make plans for school improvement by developing data-driven targets for review and revision of approaches to learning and teaching across the whole curriculum
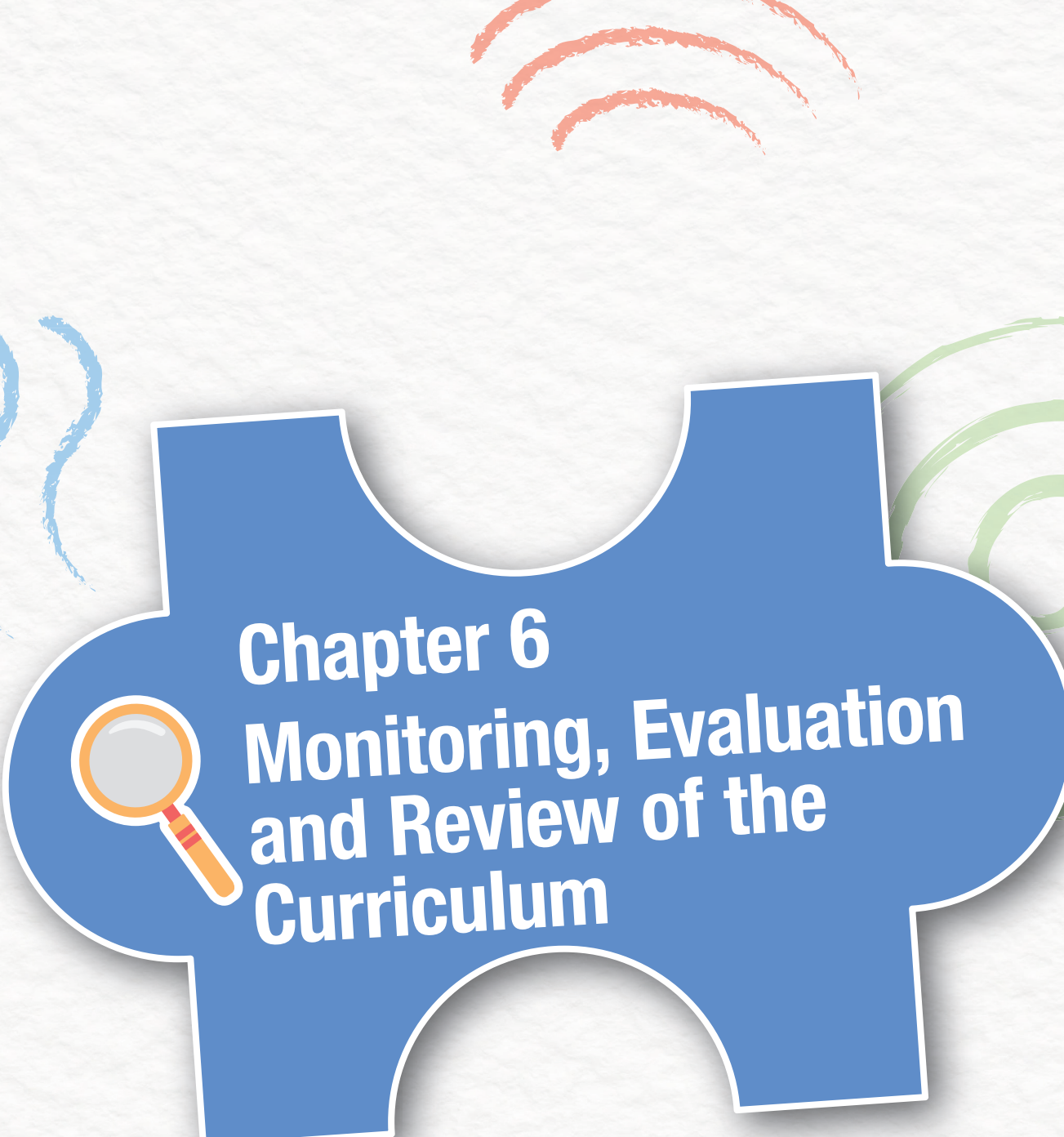
This chapter has confirmed that recognising progress and attainment through processes of assessment can bring positive results in a wide range of contexts in special schools, benefiting students, parents, teachers and other professionals, curriculum leaders and school managers and wider school communities. Used wisely, as a key element in cycles of planning, implementation and evaluation, assessment can inform continuous processes of improvement in all these dimensions. As well as having the potential to support reporting, therefore, information about student attainment and other forms of relevant data can be used to drive the evaluation of learning and teaching and processes of curriculum review. There is also potential for senior staff in special schools to use those data in order to inform plans and agendas for school improvement. In order to accelerate these possibilities, it is

important that assessment and the management and use of attainment data are located appropriately for school staff within the broader picture of curriculum development, and the improvement of learning and teaching, in special schools. Chapter 6 "Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum", provides further discussion of the roles of assessment within cycles of monitoring, evaluation and review.

For reflection and action

- How is assessment information used in your school in order to drive forward improvements in learning?

- How are data managed in your school and how are aggregated data used in order to inform school improvement?

Chapter 6
Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

Contents

Chapter 6
Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum

Page

This is one of the 7 chapters in the *Curriculum Guide for Special Schools.*
Its contents are as follows:

6

# Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum

6.1 Cycles of Curriculum Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

Staff in special schools should regard monitoring, evaluation and review as part of a cycle for optimising whole-school curriculum planning which involves:

- **Context Analysis** – reconnaissance or examination of the contexts for learning and teaching within the school

- **Curriculum Planning** – including long, medium and short term planning, planning for assessment and planning for the deployment of staff, equipment and resources

- **Curriculum Implementation** – learning and teaching activities in class, in school and life-wide

- **Curriculum Monitoring** – including ongoing assessment of student outcomes through observation and record keeping as well as more formal aspects of assessment

- **Evaluation and Review** – with opportunities to look back at curriculum plans in relation to the school context and student attainment and to make improvements

This process is illustrated in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Cycles of Curriculum Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

Evaluation and Review

Context Analysis

Curriculum Planning

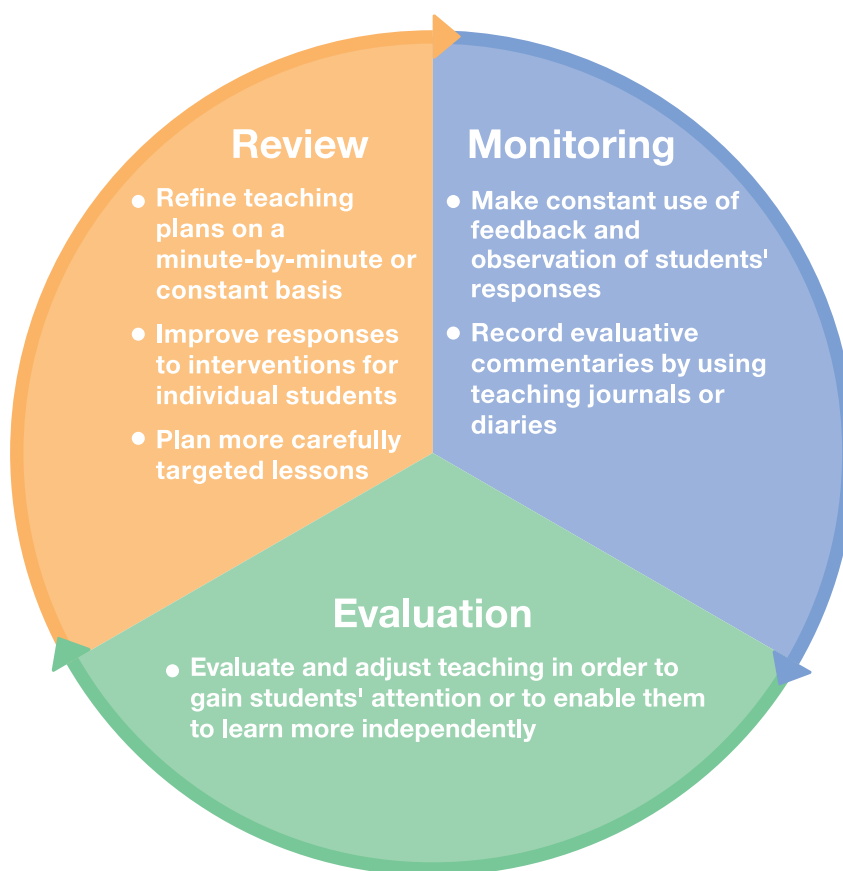Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum Monitoring
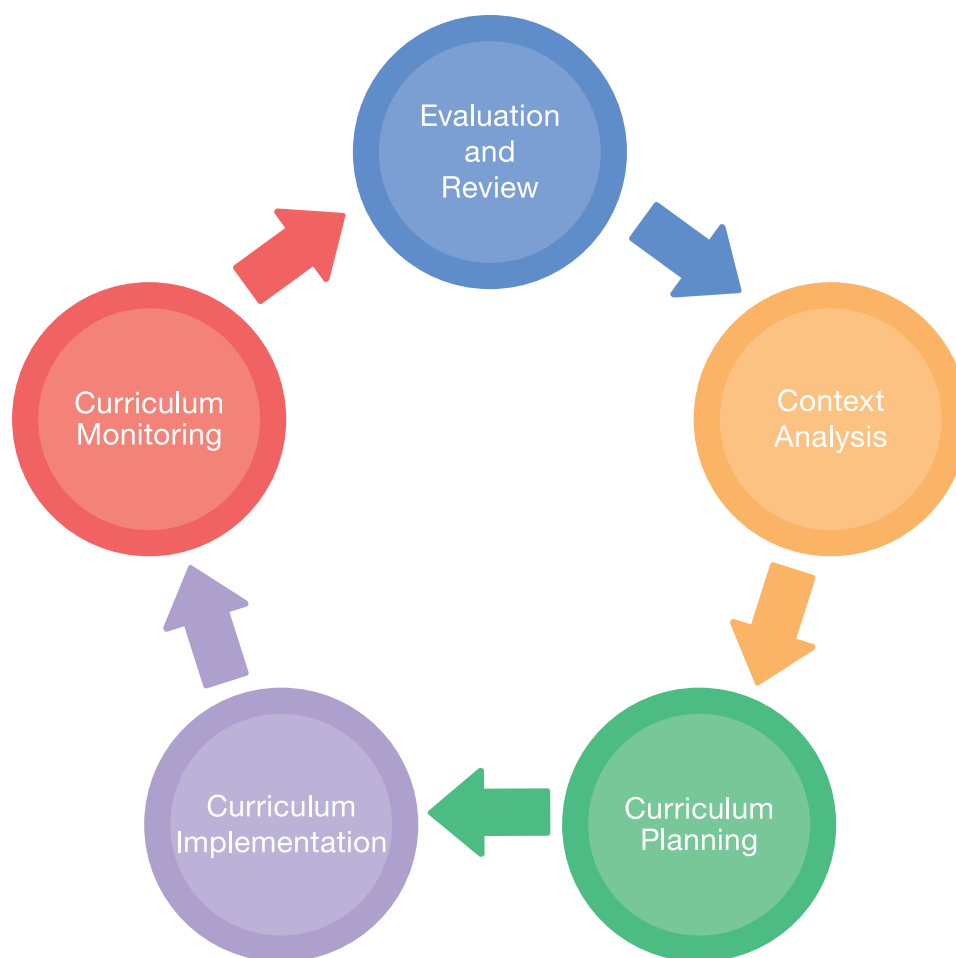
Curriculum monitoring is essentially a process of observing outcomes and gathering information about learning and the progress made by students. Curriculum evaluation implies a need to ask searching questions about the effectiveness of current curriculum planning in relation to the range of individual needs of the students in the school, the expertise of staff and levels of resourcing. The process of curriculum review suggests a drive for constant renewal and improvement in the curriculum so that planning is more effective and student attainments are enhanced. As proposed in Chapter 5, Section 5.7 "How Can the Outcomes of Assessment be Used?", staff in special schools can conceptualise processes of monitoring, evaluation and review in three phases.

In the short term, or at a micro level, teachers may make constant use of feedback and observation of students' responses in order to evaluate and adjust their teaching. Experienced teachers will engage in this kind of informed refinement of teaching plans on a minute-by-minute or effectively constant basis. Providing timely feedback and adjustments to teaching in order to gain students' attention or to enable them to demonstrate their attainments with greater independence should be regarded as part of the everyday flow of classroom activity. For more formal documentation and planning, teachers may use lesson planning formats and teaching journals/diaries to record considered evaluative commentaries about the sessions they teach in order to enable themselves and other

6

teachers in future to improve responses to interventions[27] for individual students and to plan more carefully targeted and effective lessons.

Figure 6.2 illustrates the process of curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review on micro level.

Figure 6.2 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum — **Micro Level**

Review
- Refine teaching plans on a minute-by-minute or constant basis
- Improve responses to interventions for individual students
- Plan more carefully targeted lessons

Monitoring
- Make constant use of feedback and observation of students' responses
- Record evaluative commentaries by using teaching journals or diaries

Evaluation
- Evaluate and adjust teaching in order to gain students' attention or to enable them to learn more independently

In the medium term, or at a meso level, groups of teachers, working in learning communities led by subject panel heads or curriculum co-ordinators, may make use of assessment data and evaluative comments by teachers in order to look critically at and reflect on the schemes of work. Where a number of teachers have taught a particular unit of work, for example, it will be productive for them to pool their ideas and their findings in terms of student

---

[27] "Response to Intervention" is an educational approach for early identification and the provision of support for students in needs. Students' responses to the intervention/support as well as their progress will be reviewed regularly and the level of intervention will be adjusted accordingly, in order that they can receive the most appropriate support and services.

responses in order to find ways to improve planning for future implementation. These improvements may involve the pacing or sequencing of sessions in a scheme of work; the deployment of staff, equipment and resources; differentiation in terms of modes of access and levels of learning outcome; or planning for targeted opportunities to make assessments of student attainment. These kinds of processes will enable curriculum planning systems to be maintained, updated and optimised under regular review.
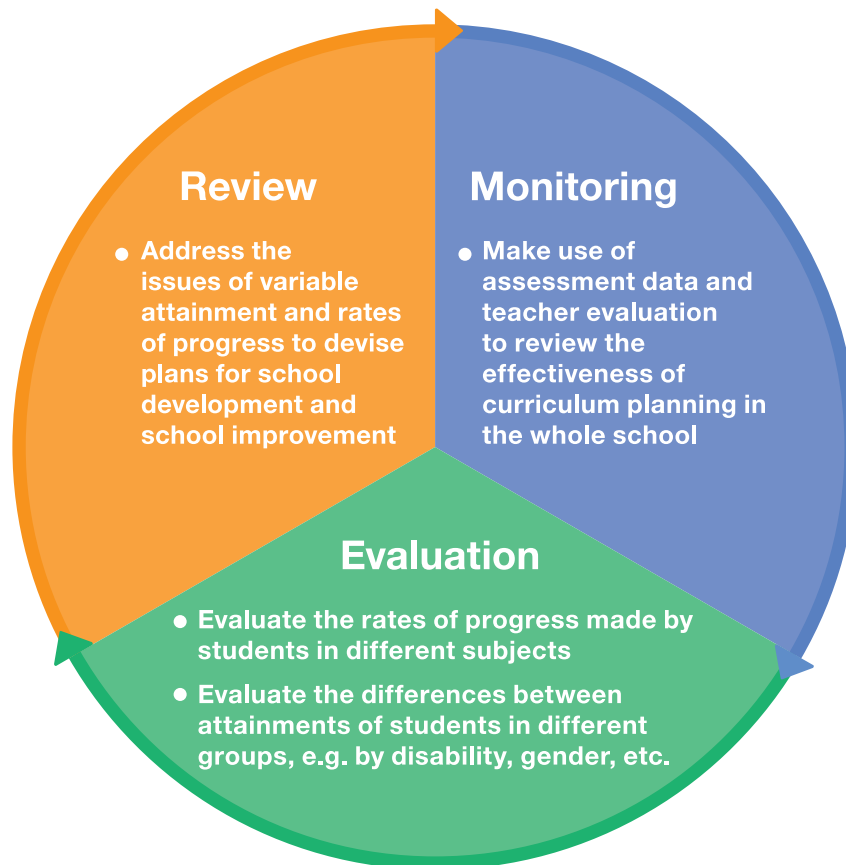
The process of curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review on meso level is shown in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum — **Meso Level**
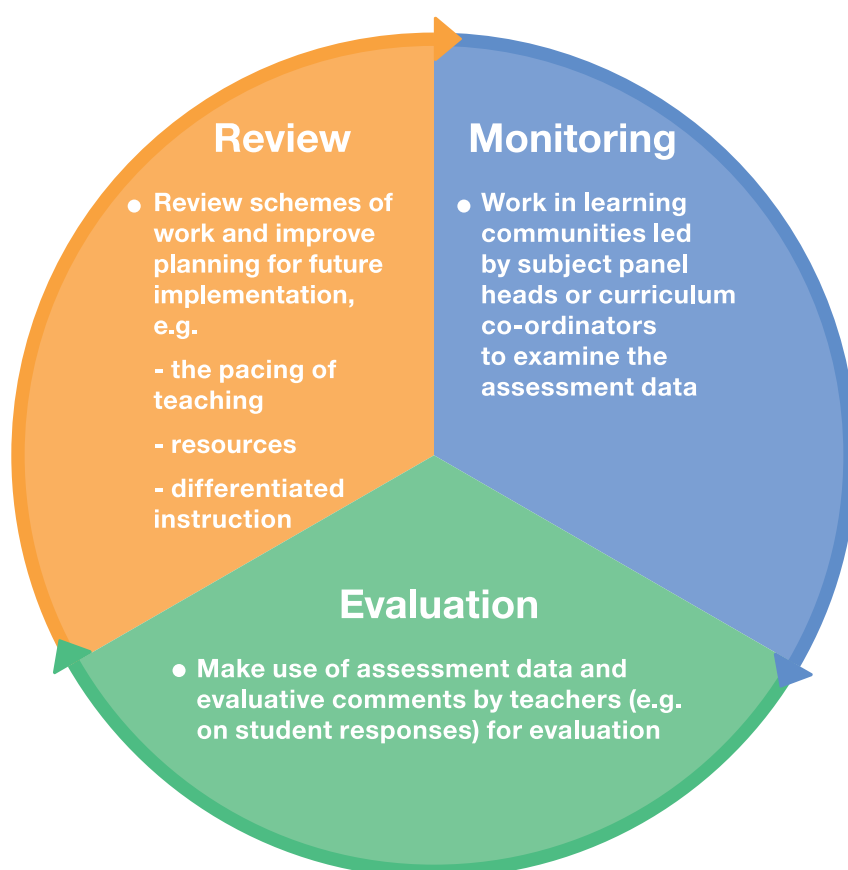
In the long, or at a macro level, school leaders can make use of assessment data and teacher evaluation to enquire into the broader effectiveness of curriculum planning and provision among others in the whole school, in order to prepare for school self-evaluation and external school review. Curriculum co-ordinators, vice principals and principals will wish to be informed, for example, about rates of progress made by students in different subjects and in various strands within subjects in different age groups/key stages. This information may lead to questions arising about the differences between attainments of students in different groups (by disability, gender, cultural background or age, etc.) and proposals being made to address those issues of variable attainment and rates of progress.

The process of curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review on macro level is illustrated in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum — **Macro Level**

Review
- Address the issues of variable attainment and rates of progress to devise plans for school development and school improvement

Monitoring
- Make use of assessment data and teacher evaluation to review the effectiveness of curriculum planning in the whole school

Evaluation
- Evaluate the rates of progress made by students in different subjects
- Evaluate the differences between attainments of students in different groups, e.g. by disability, gender, etc.

For reflection and action

- Does your school make use of curriculum planning and development processes that are similar to the cycles of curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation? What are the differences and how could these processes be improved in your school?

6.2 Data Sources for Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum

Sources of evidence that will be useful for curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review purposes may include:

- data from various forms of assessment

- examination results

- end of year reports, annual reviews of student progress and individualised education programmes

- classroom observations, lesson study and learning walks[28]

- scrutiny and analysis of planning documents including schemes of work and lesson plans

- teacher diaries and journals

- teacher evaluations and commentaries

- reports of behaviour, attendance and punctuality

- surveys of the views of parents and family members

- the views and responses of students

- analysis of extra-curricular activities, elective subjects/elements in learning and life-wide learning

Given the range of data sources on the above non-exhaustive list, it will clearly be useful to triangulate findings by looking at combinations of data. When reviewing schemes of work or curriculum plans, for example, staff might look together at teaching plans, lesson observations and assessments of student outcomes. It might also be useful to draw on the views of parents and students in order to evaluate the effectiveness of activities carried out online, at home and beyond the standard school day.

> ### For reflection and action
>
> - In collecting information for curriculum evaluation and review, how does your school include students' voices and parents' views?
>
> - What are the benefits for teachers of approaches to lesson study offering collaborative lesson preparation and post-lesson discussion?

---

[28] Learning walks are used for school improvement by looking at specific areas of development across the school, where these areas of interest or criteria are agreed upon with teachers in advance. Instead of providing feedback for individual teachers for purposes of appraisal or support, staff undertaking the learning walk will spend short periods of time in a number of classrooms or contexts for teaching looking for evidence of development in the agreed target areas.

6

6.3 Action Planning for Efficient Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

In order to be effective, approaches to curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review should be systematic. Further, monitoring, evaluation and review procedures should be manageable, using planned and agreed samples gathered over time and, where possible, information and data that teachers collect as a matter of regular practice and everyday routine.

All along schools have targeted their efforts in terms of monitoring, evaluation and review by looking in depth at focused areas, for example:

- in one term, examining learning and teaching in one strand of one subject (such as "writing" in Chinese Language)

- across two terms, scrutinising the interface between subjects as students move from one phase of learning to another, for example, from General Studies in junior secondary to Citizenship and Social Development in senior secondary for students with intellectual disability

- gathering information at the start and end of a school year in order to look, across age groups, at rates of progress against generic skills targets in individualised education programmes

It is the responsibility of senior staff to ensure that the work associated with curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review fits comfortably within the working lives of all members of school staff. This will mean, for example, focused data collection and observation exercises are built into and become an integral part of action planning for school development and the development of curriculum planning.

> ### For reflection and action
>
> - What is the relationship in your school between whole-school curriculum planning, curriculum implementation and curriculum evaluation? When should the processes of curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review begin?

6.4 Roles and Responsibilities Within Cycles of Monitoring, Evaluation and Review of the Curriculum

Curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review should not be regarded as tasks that only occupy senior staff. All staff in special schools will have roles and responsibilities within these cycles of development and improvement. For example, all school staff, including teaching and non-teaching staff, therapists and other professionals, potentially have data gathering roles to play within monitoring, evaluation and review processes.

However, procedures for monitoring, evaluation and review should be clear, simple and sustainable and they should be understood and owned by all involved. Senior staff will therefore ensure that roles and responsibilities within processes of monitoring, evaluation and review are made clear and that resources (including working time) are made available to enable staff to carry out their monitoring, evaluation and review activities. It is important that members of staff involved can see the purposes of monitoring, evaluation and review activity. It is also important that they fully accept the relevance and the significance of what they are being asked to do and that these tasks fit acceptably within their work commitments.

It helps, therefore, if processes of monitoring, evaluation and review can be an integral part of normal learning and teaching activity or part of a standard routine rather than an add-on or optional duty. Staff should see themselves as working within a learning community of colleagues in which responsibilities for curriculum leadership are widely distributed under the guidance of the curriculum co-ordinator and school leaders. As part of this shared effort, it will also be important to ensure that data and information to be used for monitoring, evaluation and review purposes are gathered from a variety of different sources and triangulated through analysis for enhancing reliability.

For reflection and action

- How does your school integrate data gathering for monitoring, evaluation and review into the daily activities of teachers and other staff?

- How does your school manage the deployment of resources to facilitate staff in taking part in curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review?

As this chapter has proposed, monitoring, evaluation and review have key roles in the cycle for optimising whole-school curriculum planning. Staff in special schools should use these processes constantly in order to drive forward improvements in planning, in practice and in policy.

6

Responsibilities for leadership in curriculum development can be shared very effectively among staff. The work of curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review should be carried out collaboratively with school communities. It will be important for schools to nurture the development of new capacity for curriculum leadership while also enhancing the curriculum planning skills of current school leaders as a key factor in school development. Thus, it will be the responsibility of subject leaders, curriculum co-ordinators, members of the school leadership team such as vice principals and principals as well as those with responsibility for governing schools to ensure that processes of monitoring, evaluation and review are well planned and that the outcomes of these processes are put to good use, so that these processes serve the best interests of students in special schools.

For reflection and action

- In what ways do processes of monitoring, evaluation and review contribute to curriculum development in your school?

- How can processes of monitoring, evaluation and review be used in your school to enhance the school-based curriculum, including curriculum planning procedures, curriculum implementation, pedagogy and assessment?

Chapter 7
Beyond School — Exit Pathways, Opportunities and Outcomes

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

Contents

Chapter 7
Beyond School — Exit Pathways, Opportunities and Outcomes

Page

This is one of the 7 chapters in the *Curriculum Guide for Special Schools.*
Its contents are as follows:

7

Beyond School – Exit Pathways, Opportunities and Outcomes

7.1 Preparation for Adult Life

Helping students prepare for their adult lives is a major part of the work of staff in special schools. In many ways, the secondary phase of education in special schools might appropriately provide a curriculum for transition into life beyond school. Firstly, the integration of the elements of life planning education[29] into different aspects of learning experiences throughout primary and secondary phases of education provides a good foundation for life planning education for students' further development. Secondly, in the senior secondary phase, learning experiences from, for example, Other Learning Experiences (OLE), courses in Applied Learning/adapted Applied Learning and sex education, could form an integral part of a coherent curriculum for transition. Curriculum leaders in special schools should be prepared systematically to explore the possibility that the curriculum should be extended and adapted in order to help students make smooth transitions into their adult lives.

It is suggested that effective planning for transitions into adult life will need to start during the upper primary phase, continue through to the completion of the senior secondary phase, and follow students into post-school provision. Through the later years of schooling, therefore, staff in special schools should provide a wide range of options for students with different needs, interests and career/life aspirations. In developing strategies for life planning education, staff should place emphasis on the use of learning time, including time outside lessons and learning experiences and activities beyond the classroom.

Students should be actively involved in life planning education. Students in special schools should be encouraged to explore their own preferences, interests and aspirations, and be enabled to develop capacities for self-reflection, the expression of choices and decision making. Students will be more able to have clear goals and aspirations for their adult lives, when they are provided with opportunities to explore, understand, make choices and prepare for their adulthood.

---

[29] For details of the components and implementation of life planning education, please refer to Part 6 of the *Guide on Life Planning Education and Career Guidance for Secondary Schools (2nd Edition)* and the *Framework of Implementation Strategies on Life Planning Education for Primary Schools.*

7

Moreover, all students should be empowered to make choices on the basis of their experiences, available options and their preferences. The process of planning transitions into adult life for students leaving special schools should also take full account of the views and expectations of parents, carers and other family members. This requires collaborative, holistic and personalised ways of working throughout the secondary phase of special schooling, with staff pursuing a multi-disciplinary approach to transition planning. Greater co-operation and collaboration with the agencies responsible for making provision for young adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities could also be strengthened, so that more appropriate transition services would be provided for students.

For reflection and action

- What measures has your school adopted to help students understand their personal strengths and difficulties, develop aspirations for their future and prepare for their adult lives?

- How does your school work with parents, family members and community to build social networks around students in preparation for their lives beyond school?

The exploration of more opportunities that enable students in special schools to fulfil their potential is accompanied by an ongoing need for professional development, networking and support for staff in the special schools in order that their practices keep pace with new initiatives. Practitioners in special education should commit to constantly enhancing their skills and developing their professional vision. Other stakeholders, such as families and students themselves also need help to recognise and embrace the realistic and relevant adult life opportunities that are being made available. This entails exemplifying, for parents and other stakeholders, vocational, occupational, residential and educational opportunities in their local neighbourhoods available for students leaving special schools.

In order to pursue possibilities like these, staff in the special schools should, in partnership with parents:

- help them be fully aware of the current exit pathways available to students leaving special schools with particular needs and attainments

- explore the potential for developing a focus on transitions to adulthood in the curriculum in the secondary phase of schooling, including opportunities to develop aspects such as

education for life planning, social relationships and interaction, community participation, and the role of information and communication technologies in contemporary life

● promote participatory approaches to transition planning for students in special schools

● explore opportunities (including vocational, educational and other aspects of adult life) of post-school provision for students leaving special school to promote choice, foster well-being and enhance quality of life

In addition, making connections between the school and other stakeholders in the community helps build powerful social networks around students and enhance their quality of life in adulthood. In a number of areas of preparation for adult life, enhanced communication and collaboration is therefore required between staff in special schools and other agencies in order to develop:

● appropriate curriculum materials

● innovative strategies for learning and teaching

● shared approaches to individual case work and support

For reflection and action

● What strategies are used in your school to raise awareness among staff, students, families and other stakeholders about post-school options?

● What contacts and connections do you have with professionals from other agencies who will be responsible for the exit pathways that your students will follow after school? How do these contacts and connections influence your work in school?

7.2 Applied Learning and Vocational Preparation

With the implementation of the New Academic Structure since 2009, like the Applied Learning courses offered for students in ordinary schools, the adapted Applied Learning courses have been provided as senior secondary elective subjects which help students with intellectual disability having different aspirations and abilities articulate multiple pathways. The purpose of these courses is to provide them with work-related experiential learning in simulated or authentic contexts to develop career-related generic skills, values and attitudes, as well as to help them explore their career aspirations and orientation for lifelong learning, rather than to provide prevocational training for specific types or forms of employment.

7

In recent years, there has been an increase in the provision of vocational or career-oriented courses that are tailored specifically for students leaving special schools to help enhance their vocational skills for future employment. Students will benefit from a range of these courses that address both vocational and wider developmental and educational priorities, and the important learning that has taken place in the secondary phase of education could then be continued.

7.3 Continuous and Further Learning

Learning should be regarded as a lifelong process. Teachers should set high expectations and sustain positive aspirations for the ongoing development of their students as they leave special schools. Post-school further or continuous learning opportunities, which are founded upon school-based attainments, can take forward aspects of learning with origins in the school curriculum and orientate towards vocational preparation and adult life. Some students following the ordinary curriculum in special schools may pursue further study at tertiary institutes/other organisations. For other students leaving special schools, some post-school provisions may need to focus on meaningful work/learning experiences, preparation for community participation and enhancement of quality of life. In addition to facilitating students' vocational exploration and preparation, special schools should focus on further fostering of students' personal growth and social development to help them be better prepared to cope with new opportunities in different aspects of adult life.

In sum, preparation for exit pathways and adult life options for students leaving special schools in future should promote a broader focus on quality of adult life, encompassing, for example, choices about purposeful day time activities, leisure pursuits, social life, domestic independence and ongoing learning.

7.4 Whole-person Development, Well-being and Quality of Life

In order to optimise the curriculum for the future for students in special schools, it will be important to foster whole-person development while recognising a diversity of needs, interests and aspirations. As Chapter 3 "Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum" has demonstrated, the curriculum in all schools should encompass elements beyond basic skills and subject learning. Teaching the whole student should mean fostering a range of aspects of development including:

- physical development
- academic or intellectual development

- emotional development

- psychological development

- social development

- sexual development

- ethical, moral and spiritual development

- citizenship development

- aesthetic development

- vocational development

Looking beyond school to adult life, it will be apparent that these aspects of development will underpin well-being and quality of life for young people and adults with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Standard measures of well-being tend to emphasise access to material resources, including jobs and earning, income, wealth and housing. But the social, emotional and psychological aspects of well-being should also be considered. Therefore, acknowledging that well-being can be both individual and collective, planning for life beyond school should also focus on health, education, security, life satisfaction, social connections, the shared environment and quality of life.

Staff in special schools should recognise that these and other aspects of well-being are enhanced when students:

- are engaged in stimulating and fulfilling activities

- find fulfilment and enjoyment in their lives

- participate in activities and experiences that promote challenge, development and growth

Satisfaction, well-being and quality of life depend upon enrichment and cannot flourish where there is stagnation. The most commonly recognised domains in quality of life[30] for adults in the general population are often identified as involving:

- psychological well-being and personal satisfaction

- social relationships and interaction

- employment

- physical and material well-being

- self-determination, autonomy and personal choice

---

[30] There are a variety of quality of life domains identified by different scholars or organisations, for example, Hughes et al. (1995), Schalock et al. (2002), and the OECD (2019). Teachers may refer to related references for more details.

7

These domains may equally apply to students leaving special schools. However, they may need to be adapted to suit those students' needs. For example, for some young people with significant special educational needs and/or disabilities:

- personal satisfaction may require advocacy and even direct support from family members, carers or other professionals

- social relationships and interactions may need to be facilitated within specially designed community-based activities

- employment may be taken to include any form of meaningful, fulfilling and productive occupation

- material well-being may require financial support

- physical well-being may depend upon the provision of ongoing care and support

- self-determination may be enacted through social and familial networks and co-agency along with individual initiative

Therefore, fostering quality of life for people with disabilities may entail the focus on both professional interventions and outcomes that are valued by individual people themselves. While sets of quality of life indicators can be used as reference for holistic planning of the whole-person development and well-being of students with special educational needs, staff in special schools should provide learning opportunities that will equip students with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes they need to live a quality life.

For many students leaving special schools, quality of life in adulthood could be greatly enhanced by the provision of ample opportunities in the curriculum to express themselves, make choices and explore and develop their use of leisure time. School staff should therefore set high expectations of their students in these areas, and at the same time, continue to communicate and collaborate with other stakeholders to explore potential choices for exit pathways and adult life for their students, so that the well-being and quality of life of these young people will be enhanced continuously.

For reflection and action

- How does your school involve students in planning their own future, enabling them to reflect on their achievements and express their hopes, dreams and aspirations for their adult lives?

- How does your school maintain contact and communicate with different organisations and outside agencies in order to understand the lives of students outside and beyond school?

- How can your school help students adapt to the changes that adult life will bring?

Resources

Curriculum Development Council. (2001). *Learning to learn - The way forward in curriculum development: Life-long learning and whole-person development.* Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council.

Curriculum Development Council. (2017). *Secondary education curriculum guide.* Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council. Retrieved from

https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/secondary/cg_documents.html

Curriculum Development Council. (2021). *Supplementary notes to the Secondary Education Curriculum Guide (2017).* Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council. Retrieved from

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/secondary/curriculum-guides-documents/Supp_notes_SECG_Eng.pdf

Curriculum Development Council. (2021). *Values education curriculum framework (Pilot version).* Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council. Retrieved from

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/VE_CF_20211129_r.pdf

Curriculum Development Council. (2024). *Primary education curriculum guide.* Hong Kong: Curriculum Development Council. Retrieved from

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/curriculum-development/major-level-of-edu/primary/curriculum-documents/Primary_Education_Curriculum_Guide/PECG%202024_full.pdf

Education and Manpower Bureau (2005). *The new academic structure for senior secondary education and higher education – Action plan for investing in the future of Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: Education and Manpower Bureau.

Education Bureau. (2021). *Guide on life planning education and career guidance for secondary schools (2nd ed.).* Hong Kong: Education Bureau. Retrieved from

https://lifeplanning.edb.gov.hk/uploads/page/attachments/Guide%20on%20LPE%20and%20CG_06092021%20%28EN-Final%29_v1.pdf

Education Bureau. (2021). *Framework of implementation strategies on life planning education for primary schools.* Hong Kong: Education Bureau. Retrieved from

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/teacher/student-guidance-discipline-services/projects-services/2122/20210929_Framework_for_LPE_for_Primary_Students_en.pdf

Education Commission. (2000). *Learning for life, learning through life: Reform proposals for the education system in Hong Kong.* Hong Kong: Education Commission.

Hughes, C., Hwang, B., Kim, J. H., Eisenman, L. T., & Killian, D. J. (1995). Quality of life in applied research: A review and analysis of empirical measures. *American Journal on Mental Retardation, 99*(6), 623-641.

Isaacs, T., Zara, C., Herbert, G., Coombs, S. J. and Smith, C. (2013). *Key concepts in educational assessment.* London: Sage Books.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2019). *OECD future of education and skills 2030: OECD learning compass 2030 – A series of concept notes.* OECD Publishing. Retrieved from

https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/edu/education-2040/1-1-learning-compass/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf

Schalock, R. L., Brown, I., Brown, R., Cummins, R. A., Felce, D., Matikka, L., Keith, K. D. & Parmenter, T. (2002). Conceptualization, measurement, and application of quality of life for persons with intellectual disabilities: Results of an international panel of experts. *Mental Retardation, 40,* 457-70.

Task Force on Review of School Curriculum. (2020). *Optimise the curriculum for the future - Foster whole-person development and diverse talents: Final report.* Hong Kong: Education Bureau. Retrieved from

https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/renewal/taskforce_cur/TF_CurriculumReview_FinalReport_e.pdf

Related Websites

Education Bureau – Ongoing Renewal of the School Curriculum
https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/renewal/index.html

Education Bureau – Values Education
https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/moral-civic/index.html

Education Bureau – Life-wide Learning
https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/life-wide-learning/index.html

Education Bureau – Key Learning Areas and Cross Disciplinary Subjects/Areas

Chinese Language Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/chi-edu/index.html

English Language Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/eng-edu/index.html

Mathematics Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/ma/index.html

Science Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/science-edu/index.html

Technology Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/technology-edu/index.html

Personal, Social and Humanities Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/pshe/index.html

Arts Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/arts-edu/index.html

Physical Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/physical-education/index.html

Humanities: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/cross-kla-studies/ph-primary/index.html

General Studies: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/cross-kla-studies/gs-primary/index.html

Citizenship and Social Development: https://cs.edb.edcity.hk/en/index_cs.php

Applied Learning: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/cross-kla-studies/applied-learning/index.html

STEAM Education: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/kla/technology-edu/steam/index.html

Reading to Learn: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/reading-to-learn/index.html

Information Technology for Interactive Learning: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/4-key-tasks/it-for-interactive-learning/index.html

Education Bureau – Life Planning Information

https://lifeplanning.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html

Education Bureau – Integrated Education and Special Education Information Online

https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html

Education Bureau – Special Educational Needs

https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/index.html

Education Bureau – Special Educational Needs: Adapted Curriculum for Students with Intellectual Disability (ID)

Primary 1 to Secondary 3 Curriculum (ID): https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/pri1-to-sec3-curriculum/index.html

Senior Secondary Curriculum (ID): https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/ssc/index.html

Senior Secondary Adapted Applied Learning Courses: https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/curriculum-development/curriculum-area/special-educational-needs/adapted-applied-learning/index.html

EDB One-stop Portal for Learning & Teaching Resources

https://www.hkedcity.net/edbosp/

Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority

https://www.hkeaa.edu.hk/en/

The resources provided are not exhaustive and only some are listed above for readers' reference.

https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/cgss