



Chapter 1

Introduction

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

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



Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction

Page

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

1.1	Purpose of this Guide	1-1
1.2	Target Audience for the Guide	1-1
1.3	How Should the Guide be Used	1-2
1.4	The Direction of Curriculum Development in Special Schools	1-3
1.5	Balanced Development – Continuous Enhancement	1-4



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.

1.4 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.