



Chapter 2

Curriculum Planning in Special Schools

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

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



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Chapter 2

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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:

- 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.



For reflection and action

- In your school, what modifications, adaptations or adjustments have been made to the curriculum to facilitate the implementation of the subjects you teach? Why were these modifications, adaptations and adjustments made?
- How does the school-based curriculum policy implemented in your school support learning for students with a range of individual needs and difficulties?

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?

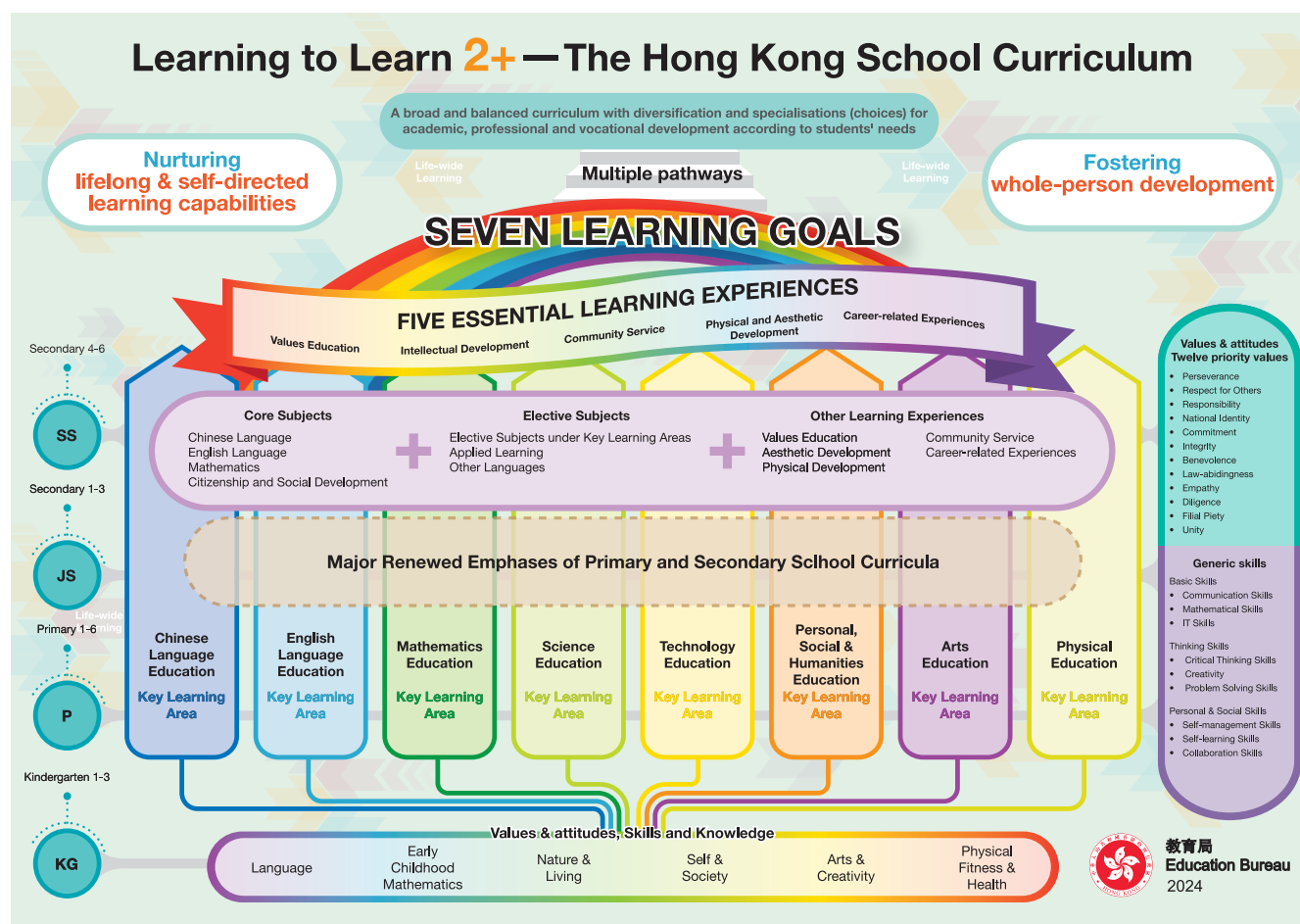
2.3 Establishing Aims for the School Curriculum

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



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 attitudes², 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”.

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

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





For reflection and action

- What broad aims inform curriculum development and implementation in your school? At what point were these aims agreed upon and when were they last subjected to review?
- Working as a curriculum development team, undertake a review of your school's aims. Update and renew these aims to bring them in line with the curriculum and learning and teaching in your school.

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



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.

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.

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 Studies³ 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 PEGG (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

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

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 time⁴, 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?