



Chapter 3

Addressing Specific Learning Elements of the Curriculum

Curriculum Guide for Special Schools

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Chapter 3

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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

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 PCEG (2024) and the SECG (2017), and related documents⁵ 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.

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 Skills⁷

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 Skills⁸

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 Skills⁹

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.

- 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 Skills¹⁰

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

Creativity¹¹

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 Skills¹²

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 Skills¹³

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 living¹⁴
- 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 Skills¹⁵

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 Skills¹⁶

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.



For reflection and action

- In what ways are generic skills implemented in your school? Work with your colleagues to develop illustrative case studies to show the cross-curricular application of the important skills you seek to develop for your students and how these skills can also be practised outside of school.

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 areas¹⁷, 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).

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 Others¹⁸

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.

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

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



For reflection and action

- What kind of cross-curricular activities can you think of to help students make connections between subject knowledge and daily life applications?
- How does your school's guidance policy address the social, emotional, psychological and learning needs of students as they make transitions from class to class and from key stages to key stages?

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

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 models¹⁹ 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 functions²⁰, 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 PEGC (2024).

²⁰ Refer to Booklet 7 of the SECG (2017), p.5 and Chapter 8.2.1 of the PEGC (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?