The Pilot Project on Strengthening Schools’ Administration Management (Pilot Project) covers various types of public sector schools, and since its implementation from the 2011/12 school year, ten special schools have joined in. With a different context, special schools have particular issues of concern that vary considerably from those of ordinary schools. As such, special schools participating in the Pilot Project have taken a school-based approach that allows them to map out strategies appropriate to their circumstances and needs, and to provide teachers with administrative support so that teachers’ capacity can be released to address students’ needs.

The implementation experience of four of the special schools participating in the Pilot Project is consolidated in this issue to demonstrate how they have introduced measures having regard to their context to strengthen administrative management. Their ways of developing appropriate measures in line with their circumstances and students’ needs, the factors they have considered in relation to implementation, as well as the experience and insights derived from implementation could serve as a source of reference not just for other special schools but also for all ordinary schools.

Experience Sharing by Participating Schools

(I) Hong Kong Red Cross Princess Alexandra School

Background:

The school mainly serves students with physical disabilities and provides residential services for the needy students. Apart from learning programmes, it also offers rehabilitation services, such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy, to improve students’ physical fitness and help them manage better their movements. When looking after students, staff members are often required to lift and carry them and are thus susceptible to work-related injury. What is more, since the school premises were completed in 1989, the initial spatial planning may not be able to serve the prevailing operational needs. The school is therefore concerned about raising staff members’ awareness of occupational safety and health. It seeks to create a safe working environment and improve the overall spatial planning for an appropriate use of storage space.
Seeking Professional Advice and Implementing Recommendations

The school commissioned a professional consultant to conduct a risk assessment to review its daily operation from various aspects, including efficiency, effectiveness, reliability and legal compliance. Dedicated officers were assigned to inspect the campus and boarding section with a team of school officers from different subject panels. Upon completion of the assessment, the consultant offered specific recommendations to the school on safety management and risk control measures, workplace housekeeping, inspection procedures, manual handling operations and so on.

Establishing a Mechanism and Refining the Culture

To ensure the implementation of the consultant’s recommendations and the sustainability of the project, the school engaged supporting staff to conduct site visits and held meetings with frontline staff to follow up on the improvement measures. A Good Housekeeping Scheme was launched and a 5S Working Group (5S is a workplace organisation methodology) was set up to provide more staff training to increase the awareness of occupational safety and health. Meanwhile, the supporting staff has drawn up a set of guidelines on the use of school space and occupational safety and health based on the school’s operational needs and the consultant’s views, and developed an e-resources depository in line with the school sponsoring body (SSB)’s framework and principles for the effectuation of knowledge management, with the aim of sustaining the improvement measures.

Views Worth Sharing:

Promoting innovative thinking and refining work culture are crucial elements in enhancing the efficiency of school management. The school considers that acting on the professional advice set out in the consultant’s report not only prompts frontline staff to pay closer attention to day-to-day management and operational arrangements, but also improves communication between the management and frontline staff, thereby raising the overall quality of the management and service delivery of the school. The school also deems it advisable to consider the staff’s prevailing work culture and communicate well with the staff before implementing improvement measures step by step. Furthermore, establishing objective criteria to measure success (such as the extent of reducing work-related injury) may help demonstrate to stakeholders the effectiveness of the measures in a bid to enhance their understanding and recognition of the new initiatives.
(II) TWGHs Tsui Tsin Tong School

Background:

Located in Wah Fu Estate with a boarding section in Wong Chuk Hang, the school serves students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. School buses are available to carry boarding and non-boarding students to and from the campus along various routes. It is not uncommon for students to apply for sick leave, arrive late, or leave early for medical appointments or routine check-ups. As they might not be able to explain themselves clearly, teachers had to repeatedly check the daily attendance record for updating the meal orders and the passenger lists of all school bus routes. Such procedures were cumbersome and laborious. To address this, the school commissioned a contractor to develop an electronic platform where such administrative work can be computerised.

Giving Detailed Consideration to Operational Needs

As the school considered it necessary for the new system to support its daily operation, an attendance recording system was introduced in parallel to store students’ attendance data by electronic means. Linked up to the new system, the attendance recording system serves as a one-stop platform for handling lunch and school bus arrangements based on students’ daily attendance and activity schedules. In this way, repetitive data entry can be avoided and data errors are minimised. Furthermore, the school management has, in light of the division of work in the long term, defined staff’s access rights on an individual basis to ensure proper storage and retrieval of data.

The functions of the new system also facilitate follow-up actions on administrative work, contributing to enhanced efficiency. For instance, besides working out the number of lunch orders and compiling the passenger lists of school buses, the system can automatically calculate the fees for individual items according to students’ attendance records, and generate text messages to notify parents of special circumstances (e.g. school bus delays).

Collecting More Views for Formulation of Strategies

Before setting out to develop the system, the school conducted a questionnaire survey to gauge the views of stakeholders, such as teachers and staff responsible for managing data about lunch orders and school bus services, in order to identify their difficulties and needs as inputs for a finalised design of the electronic system. Since staff members at different levels will be affected, their work culture and information technology (IT) literacy have to be taken into account when designing the system.
Facilitating the Flow of Information to Improve Liaison

The integrated electronic administration platform enables teachers, assistants and janitors to create records of students’ learning and health condition (e.g. medication schedules, quantity of food/drinks consumed or amount of excretion/defecation) in a one-stop manner, and to consolidate or sort out data of individual students when the school so requires. This helps staff members make timely and appropriate arrangements in response to students’ condition and facilitates the flow of information among the school, the hostel, parents and healthcare institutions. Moreover, a calendar module is available on the platform for assisting users to handle daily manpower deployment and reminding them of the items requiring attention each day, thereby further easing teachers’ day-to-day administrative workload.

Views Worth Sharing:

From a technical perspective, schools that develop a school-based system on their own will find it easier to continuously fine-tune and upgrade the system functions to meet their respective needs for the purpose of succession and enhancement. Besides, adjustments can be made as appropriate to cater for staff’s work routine and adaptability to IT. For example, given the low IT literacy of janitors, a mobile application was developed along with the new administration platform. The application enables janitors, while looking after students, to instantly document students’ health condition by simple touch-screen steps. Such an initiative has further enhanced the efficiency in the management and transfer of information.
Planning with School-based Approach to Cater for Learning Diversity

Consolidating curriculum outlines, teaching plans and ability indicators of different levels, the school-based electronic platform enables teachers to upload teaching materials of individual modules for constructing a comprehensive depository of teaching resources, and to assess and record students’ learning performance according to the ability indicators of a particular module. Capable of generating different forms of reports based on assessment data, the system reduces the time to be spent on data analysis so that teachers can more readily identify students’ abilities and learning progress and hence make timely adjustments to teaching arrangements and follow up with parents. Meanwhile, subject panels can make use of the system to adjust their curriculum and teaching schedules having regard to students’ learning progress for the purpose of catering for learning diversity.

Additionally, the school has created a multimedia portfolio incorporating various types of teaching materials with a QR-Code compatible with most of the existing mobile applications. Teachers can easily save and retrieve teaching materials by logging on the system with their mobile devices. This helps reduce the time they spend on preparing teaching materials and hence enhance effectiveness.

Views Worth Sharing:

Improving school administration can help strengthen support for students, enhance the school’s teaching quality as a whole and in the long run, benefit the development of the school. The experience of the school in developing an electronic platform to consolidate and analyse students’ assessment data for following up with their learning progress and in saving and retrieving teaching materials by a QR-Code could serve as a source of reference for all other schools.

(IV) Hong Chi Lions Morninghill School

Background:

The school serves students with mild intellectual disabilities. Its curriculum is designed to promote the development of students, and is supported by a school-based assessment framework comprising a set of ability indicators that correspond to the contents of different subjects to ensure a coherent and structured learning process. Given the numerous ability indicators, teachers had to spend considerable time compiling and analysing statistics to assess students’ learning progress. Since the ready-made electronic systems available in the market can hardly satisfy the requirements of school-based assessment, the school hired a substitute teacher by using the resources provided under the Pilot Project to share the teaching load of an IT teacher so that the latter could have capacity to develop a school-based electronic platform. The platform keeps track of students’ learning progress in a systematic manner and enables teachers to design and revise curriculum in light of the assessment data and adjust their teaching plans in a timely manner.
Summing Up

At present, there are 60 special schools in Hong Kong, and students of each school have their specific needs. These schools have to cope with plenty of administrative work on curriculum, assessment, classroom arrangements, manpower deployment, personal care, liaison with stakeholders, etc. As shown by the experience of the four special schools mentioned above, it is possible for schools to formulate improvement measures in light of their context and the needs of their students. These four schools have respectively taken forward enhancement measures in the areas of school premises management, attendance-taking and financial management, liaison with stakeholders as well as student assessment, and employed various strategies, such as commissioning consultancy services and developing multipurpose electronic platforms, to streamline procedures of their routine administrative work in a bid to lessen teachers’ workload.

The Pilot Project has entered its fourth phase. While Phases I and II were primarily implemented on a school basis, projects under Phases III and IV were SSB-based, with SSBs taking a coordinating role to lead sponsored schools in employing improvement measures to meet their needs. As the Pilot Project puts great emphasis on the sustainability and far-sightedness of improvement measures, the participating schools’ experience and achievements in undertaking the projects, which cover various areas such as using electronic tools, procuring professional consultancy services, and developing integrated school administrative management platforms, can be further and continuously built on, with the aim of reducing teachers’ administrative workload in the long run.

The successful implementation of the Pilot Project hinges on the participation and support of the participating SSBs and schools, working groups and stakeholders. We would like to express our sincere appreciation for their sharing of valuable inputs and practical experience, which is definitely conducive to the dissemination of good practices and deliverables to other schools. School administration involves a wide spectrum of areas, and the measures taken by participating schools merely cover some of them. Looking forward, we hope that more and more schools will constantly examine their administrative operation from different aspects so as to strengthen administrative management and release teachers from administrative workload to take good care of students.
For more details of the projects mentioned above, please directly approach the contact persons of the schools concerned. For other enquiries, please contact the School Administration and Management Section (Telephone Number: 2863 4606/2863 4624).

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In addition to those introduced in this Bulletin, there are various effective measures developed by other participating SSBs and schools to strengthen administrative management. Relevant details, together with this Bulletin, are available on EDB website:

Acknowledgements

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◆ TWGHs Tsui Tsin Tong School
◆ Hong Chi Pinehill No.2 School
◆ Hong Chi Lions Morninghill School