

25 May 2021

Education Bureau Circular No. 5/2021

Enhancements to Support of Professional and Auxiliary Staff in Aided Special Schools

[Note: This circular should be read by –

- (a) Supervisors and heads of aided special schools – for action; and
- (b) Heads of sections – for information.]

Summary

To improve the quality of special education, the Education Bureau (EDB) will, starting from the 2021/22 school year, further enhance the support provided by professional and auxiliary staff in aided special schools (special schools) and allow flexibility in staff appointment to enable schools to meet the needs of schools and their students. This circular sets out the details and reminds special schools to optimise the use of the resources and manpower for the provision of appropriate education for their students.

Background

2. To help special schools to appropriately cater for the learning needs of students with more severe or multiple disabilities, the EDB has been continuously reviewing and enhancing the support measures for special schools from the perspective of education profession. In recent years, the Government has allocated considerable resources to the area of education. Apart from benefiting from the improvement measures for public sector schools, special schools also benefit from various enhancement measures that target on special schools (details at [Annex 1](#)). Special schools are requested to holistically and flexibly deploy the resources and manpower (including teachers, non-teaching specialist staff, staff of boarding section (if applicable), auxiliary staff, etc.) to systematically formulate and implement “individualised education programmes” (IEP) to foster students’ learning and development under the principle of Whole School Approach. Students’ progress in various learning aspects should be timely reviewed with a view to helping them gradually achieve the targets of their IEP.

Details of New Measures

3. From the 2021/22 school year, the EDB will implement a series of new measures to further enhance the team of professional and auxiliary staff in special schools and allow flexibility in staff appointment to enable special schools to meet the needs of schools and their students. Details of the measures are as follows:

Enhancing the support of professional staff

Upgrading the posts of Occupational Therapist II and Physiotherapist II

4. To enhance the quality of occupational therapy and physiotherapy in special schools so that students could have better support, from the 2021/22 school year, Occupational Therapist II (OTII) and Physiotherapist II (PTII) posts within the approved establishment of special schools will be upgraded to Occupational Therapist I (OTI) and Physiotherapist I (PTI) posts.

5. OTI and PTI are promotion posts. As far as staff promotion is concerned, schools must act in accordance with the Codes of Aid, the School Administration Guide and the established school-based selection criteria and mechanism. Specifically, if the serving OTII/PTII within the approved establishment of the special schools has met the promotion requirements for OTI/PTI, the schools should act accordingly under the aforesaid mechanism. Should the respective staff be promoted, please inform the EDB by completing the Staff Promotion Form. If the serving OTII/PTII within the approved establishment has yet to meet the promotion requirements, the schools concerned may retain the OTII/PTII until (i) he/she meets the relevant requirements and is promoted to OTI/PTI under the school-based promotion mechanism, or (ii) he/she leaves the post through natural wastage. During this transition period, the retained post(s) should be offset by an equivalent number of OTI/PTI post(s) within the approved establishment. For schools that have OTI/PTI post vacancies, they may conduct recruitment exercises direct in accordance with the standing procedures for recruitment. Since all OTII and PTII posts within the approved establishment will be upgraded to OTI and PTI posts starting from 1 September 2021, special schools will no longer be allowed to appoint OTII and PTII with the Salaries Grant from that date onwards.

Creating a Nursing Officer rank

6. There is a rising need for support of senior medical staff in special schools due to the increased complexity of disabilities and medical situation of students admitted. Currently, Registered Nurses (RN) in special schools (including boarding sections) are basically RN(General)¹ who are holders of a Certificate of Registration (Part I) and a valid Practising Certificate issued by the Nursing Council of Hong Kong. From the 2021/22 school year, for special schools with

¹ They are remunerated with a salary at Civil Service Master Pay Scale (MPS) Points 15 to 25 (with omitted points at MPS Points 17 and 21).

a total of four or more RN posts on the approved establishment of both the school and boarding sections, one in every four of these RN posts will be upgraded to the rank of Nursing Officer (NO). The NO has to assist the school head in leading the nurse team in the school section and the boarding section (if applicable) to cater for the needs of students (in particular students and boarders with medical complexity).

7. Normally, the NO post(s) will be included in the approved establishment of the school section. If schools opt to allocate the NO post(s) in the approved establishment of the boarding section in light of the school context, they should complete the form at Annex 2(i) and submit it to the EDB for action on or before 30 June of the preceding school year. Take the 2021/22 school year as an example, schools must submit the option form on or before 30 June 2021. As regards the entry requirements, pay and conditions of service for the NO rank, please refer to Annex 2(ii).

8. NO is a promotion post of RN. As far as staff promotion is concerned, schools must act in accordance with the Codes of Aid, the School Administration Guide and the established school-based selection criteria. Specifically, for schools with NO post(s) on the establishment, if all the RN posts of the school section and the boarding section are filled, the schools may consider promoting eligible nurse(s) from the serving RN as NO(s), or maintain the status quo by offsetting an equivalent number of NO post(s) within the approved establishment if no suitable candidate is identified. For schools that have RN vacancies, they may consider promoting eligible serving RN(s) to the post(s) of NO; or conduct recruitment exercises direct in accordance with the standing procedures for recruitment if no suitable candidate is identified.

Allowing flexibility to recruit a Registered Nurse with psychiatric nursing training

9. As the number of students with mental health problems is increasing, special schools may need nurses with the respective training to cater for the said students. From the 2021/22 school year, for special schools with a total of two or more RN posts on the approved establishment of both the school and boarding sections, when a vacancy for RN arises, they may, having regard to students' needs, flexibly recruit not more than one RN with psychiatric nursing training² to fill the vacant post. Please note that RN with psychiatric nursing training must have a Certificate of Registration (Part II) and a valid Practising Certificate issued by the Nursing Council of Hong Kong.

10. The enhancement measures stated above aim to further enhance the support of the professional staff in special schools for the provision of better quality service for students. As such, special schools should, premised upon students' needs, employ appropriate professional staff as far as possible. Should special schools encounter difficulties in recruiting such professional staff, they

² The salary of Registered Nurses with psychiatric nursing training is at MPS Points 17 to 26.

may, where deemed necessary, freeze some of the vacancies in exchange for the Cash Grant for Specialist Staff in Aided Special Schools for engaging qualified temporary staff or hiring relevant professional services under the existing arrangement. Please refer to the latest circular memorandum³ issued by the EDB on the purpose and administrative arrangements of the Grant.

Enhancing the support of auxiliary staff

Providing schools for children with mild intellectual disability with school bus drivers

11. In recent years, schools for children with mild intellectual disability (MiID) have admitted quite a number of students with relatively severe emotional and behavioural problems, such as those identified as also having other special needs including autism spectrum disorders or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. This has rendered their procurement of school bus services rather difficult. To ensure the availability of school bus services to needy students, from the 2021/22 school year, the EDB will provide schools for children with MiID (including the MiID section of schools for children with MiID and moderate intellectual disability (MoID) as well as schools for children with MiID, MoID and severe intellectual disability, hereinafter the same shall apply) with school bus driver post(s) on their establishment.

12. As in the case of other types of special schools, the EDB will consider a basket of factors, including students' needs, the actual operation of schools and the number of registered school buses serving the schools, etc., before granting approval for the provision of school bus driver posts. Since children with MiID are relatively more capable and school education will help them enhance their capability, some of them will gradually be able to commute to schools on their own by public transport. Hence, the EDB will impose a cap equivalent to 50% of the approved capacity in schools for children with MiID (or respective section) in calculating the number of students in need and consider the aforementioned factors in approving bus driver post(s) on their establishment.

Providing school bus driver posts at Special Driver rank

13. In accordance with the improvement in referral and placement mechanism, special schools are admitting students living in districts farther away from school. In addition, quite a number of the students are having more severe emotional and behavioural problems or physical conditions. In this connection, to ensure the health and safety of students, special schools will purchase school buses of smaller capacity⁴ to better cater for students and shorten the travelling time to and from

³ The prevailing one is EDB Circular Memorandum No. 13/2014 on Cash Grant for Specialist Staff in Aided Special Schools.

⁴ Currently, school bus driver posts within the approved establishment are ranked at Motor Driver for school bus(es) with fewer than 30 seats or at Special Driver for school bus(es) with 30 or more seats.

school. From the 2021/22 school year, school bus driver posts on the establishment in various types of special schools will be provided at the rank of Special Driver across the board to maintain the stability of school bus driver posts on the establishment and to provide better service for the students.

14. If the serving Motor Driver within the approved establishment of the special schools has met the requirements for appointment as Special Driver, the schools may complete the form of “Appointment Form of Non-teaching Staff in Aided Special Schools” and submit it to the EDB for action. If the serving Motor Driver has, by 1 September 2021, yet to meet the requirements for appointment as Special Driver, the schools may retain the Motor Driver until (i) he/she meets the requirements for appointment as Special Driver, or (ii) he/she leaves the post through natural wastage. During this transition period, the retained post(s) should be offset by an equivalent number of Special Driver post(s) within the approved establishment. Since school bus driver posts within the approved establishment will be provided at the rank of Special Driver across the board starting from 1 September 2021, special schools will no longer be allowed to appoint Motor Driver with the Salaries Grant from that date onwards.

Other auxiliary staff

15. In view of the difficulties encountered by special schools in recruiting teacher assistants, cooks, school bus drivers and watchmen, which subsequently affected their service quality, from the 2021/22 school year, special schools may flexibly freeze vacant posts of teacher assistant, cook, special driver and watchman on their approved establishment in exchange for cash grant. The maximum entitlement period in which a vacant post may be frozen is one year, and under no circumstances should the entitlement period be shorter than 30 days. The amount of cash grant is determined by the mid-point salary⁵ of the relevant ranks together with the employer’s contributions to the Mandatory Provident Fund where appropriate.

16. The enhancement measures mentioned above aim to accord flexibility to special schools in their staff appointment so as to further enhance the support for students provided by auxiliary staff in special schools and to meet the needs of schools and their students. Special schools may, where deemed necessary, choose to freeze all/some of the vacancies in exchange for the cash grant for auxiliary staff in aided special schools for recruiting such temporary auxiliary staff as teacher assistants, cooks, school bus drivers and watchmen. If schools opt to freeze the vacancies of watchman in exchange for the grant, they may consider using the grant to procure security services for their boarding section. Please refer to Annex 3 for the use of various cash grants for auxiliary staff and the relevant administrative arrangements.

⁵ The current mid-point salary of the auxiliary staff concerned is - Teacher Assistant: Model Scale 1 Pay Scale Point 4; Cook: MPS Point 7; Special Driver: MPS Point 9; Watchman: Model Scale 1 Pay Scale Point 8.

17. In line with the implementation of the above-mentioned enhancement measures, revisions will be made to relevant parts of the Code of Aid for Special Schools, Code of Aid for Aided Schools and Compendium to Code of Aid for Aided Schools accordingly.

Evaluation

18. Under the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools are required to assess annually the effectiveness of their provision of education and support (including boarding service, if applicable) for students through self-evaluation mechanism to promote school development on an ongoing basis. Special schools are required to explain their policies on the provision of education and support (including boarding service, if applicable) for students, school-based measures and resource deployment (including the new measures set out in this circular) in their Annual School Plan and School Report every school year, and state the effectiveness of the school-based measures in their School Report, which should be uploaded onto the school website upon endorsement by the Incorporated Management Committee for the information of stakeholders (including school staff, parents, students, etc.).

Enquiries

19. For enquiries about the above new measures, schools may contact the Senior Inspector of the Special Education Support 1 Section (telephone no.: 3509 7477). For enquiries about staff establishment, appointment and administrative matters, schools may contact the respective Senior School Development Officers.

Godwin LAI
for Permanent Secretary for Education

Major Improvement Measures in Recent Years

2014/15 school year

- Reducing the class size progressively to 12 students per class for the school for children with visual impairment (VI school) and schools for social development (SSD)
- Providing additional teacher assistants for schools for children with intellectual disability (ID schools), schools for children with physical disability (PD schools), and the school for children with visual impairment cum intellectual disability (VI cum ID school), as well as the psychiatric classes of the Hospital Schools
- Improving the manning ratios of Saturday and Sunday boarding service in special schools; and upgrading the posts of enrolled nurse as registered nurse in the boarding section of VI schools, the school for children with hearing impairment (HI school) and schools for children with moderate intellectual disability (MoID schools)
- Providing an additional grant to enhance the support for boarders with medical complexity in special schools

2015/16 school year

- Increasing the ratio of graduate teacher posts in public sector primary schools (including primary section of special schools) by phases in three years to attract more talents to the teaching force of special education so as to enhance the quality of teaching

2016/17 school year

- As with aided secondary schools, allowing special schools to convert the Senior Secondary Curriculum Support Grant and the Career and Life Planning Grant into regular teaching posts
- Providing an additional grant for schools for children with severe intellectual disability (SID schools), PD schools and the VI cum ID school for employing additional nurses and related staff to strengthen the support for 24-hour ventilator-assisted students

2017/18 school year

- Increasing the teacher-to-class ratio for aided primary, secondary schools and special schools by 0.1 across the board to provide additional teaching staff for schools to take forward various education initiatives to enhance the quality of education
- Providing a recurrent cash grant for all public sector primary and secondary schools

(including special schools) to strengthen their information technology (IT) staffing support for implementing e-learning and taking forward various education initiatives that harness IT

- Providing an Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) for special schools with one to five approved primary classes to replace the provision of the Curriculum Leadership Grant
- Providing an occupational therapist and an occupational therapist assistant for VI schools, the HI school, MiID schools and MoID schools to enhance their support for students displaying weaknesses in fine motor skills and eye-hand co-ordination
- Providing a speech therapist for VI schools and SSD to enable them to develop and implement comprehensive and tailored school-based support schemes to support the special educational needs of students with speech and language impairment
- Extending the Additional Support Grant for Enhancing the Support for Boarders with Medical Complexity in Aided Special Schools to cover day students and boarders with medical complexity in VI schools, the HI school, MoID schools, SID schools and PD schools
- Installing air-conditioning systems in the standard teaching facilities (including classrooms and special rooms), student activity centres and assembly halls of public sector schools (including special schools). This arrangement also covered bedrooms, study rooms, TV/common rooms and dining/multi-purpose rooms in the boarding sections of special schools.

2018/19 school year

- Providing one additional school nurse in ID schools, PD schools and the VI cum ID school, and expanding school nurse provision to cover the VI school and the HI school, such that each of these schools would have a school nurse to strengthen their support for students with care needs
- Improving the provision of school social workers (SSW) in special schools. Special schools with a capacity of 60 or less would be provided with 1 SSW and subsequently 0.5 SSW for every 30 students. Under this improvement measure, each special school would be provided with at least one SSW. Moreover, special schools would receive a unit of Consultation Service Grant per SSW to procure consultation, supervision or other support services.
- Providing a recurrent Air-conditioning Grant for aided schools (including special schools) to cover the daily expenses of related facilities, including electricity charges and routine maintenance costs

- Providing a Promotion of Reading Grant for public sector schools (including special schools) to support schools in strengthening the promotion of reading and encourage students to develop a good reading habit from a young age
- Regularising the Pilot Scheme on Promoting Interflows between Sister Schools in Hong Kong and the Mainland by providing recurrent grant and professional support for public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools (including special schools) that have formed sister schools with their counterparts in the Mainland to enrich students' learning experiences and promote teachers' professional development through longer-term planning of exchange activities

2019/20 school year

- Implementing the all-graduate teaching force policy in public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) in one go
- Providing extra administrative manpower/resources for public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) to hire additional administrative staff for implementing the "One Executive Officer for Each School" policy
- Providing a recurrent Life-wide Learning Grant for public sector schools (including special schools) to support them in taking forward, on the present foundation, life-wide learning with enhanced efforts

2020/21 school year

- Upgrading the ranks of warden and assistant warden on the establishment of boarding sections with a capacity of 40 or more, and increasing the number of assistant warden and houseparent-in-charge on the establishment correspondingly to strengthen the collaboration between the management teams of boarding sections and school sections in special schools and provide more appropriate life skills training and counselling for boarders
- Further improving the manning ratios of Saturday and Sunday boarding service so that special schools offering 7-day boarding service could have more adequate manpower to take care of their boarders
- Providing an additional grant for the boarding sections in PD schools, MoID schools, SID schools and the VI cum ID school to employ personal care workers or hire related services
- Upgrading the Primary School Curriculum Leader posts in public sector primary schools (including special schools with a primary section) operating 11 or fewer classes from the

provision of an Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) post or the Curriculum Leadership Grant to a Primary School Master/Mistress (Curriculum Development) post

- Enhancing the demarcation arrangements for headship rankings and the manpower arrangements of vice-principals in public sector secondary schools (including special schools)
- Including the additional teaching posts generated from the 0.1 increase in teacher-to-class ratio as from the 2017/18 school year in the calculation of promotion posts in public sector secondary schools (including special schools)
- Improving the conversion arrangements for determining the headship ranking and provision of vice-principals/deputy heads in special schools and the manpower arrangements for vice-principals/deputy heads in special schools operating both primary and secondary sections

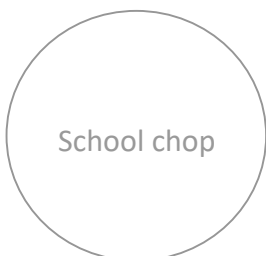
To: Education Bureau
[Attn: Chief School Development Officer ()]

School arrangement for the post of Nursing Officer

According to approved establishment of our school section and boarding section (if applicable) for the 20____ / ____ school year, a total of _____ Nursing Officer post(s) will be provided and opted to be included in our staff establishment as follows:

_____ Nursing Officer post(s) within the staff establishment of our school section, and
_____ Nursing Officer post(s) within the staff establishment of our boarding section (if applicable),
with effect from _____ (date) according to our tentative schedule.

The above arrangement has been endorsed by resolution of the Incorporated Management Committee (IMC). We understand that should there be any changes to the above arrangement, resolution of the IMC is also required, and the respective Chief School Development Officer should be informed of the latest decision as early as possible to facilitate the update of the approval letter in respect of staff establishment.



Signature of school supervisor : _____

Name of school supervisor : _____

Name of school : _____

Date : _____

c.c. Senior Education Officer (Special Education Support 1)

[Fax no.: 2147 1406]

Approved establishment for non-teaching staff in aided special schools
Nursing Officer

Details of entry requirements, pay and conditions of service for the Nursing Officer post are as follows:

Entry requirements:

Candidates must have –

1. a Certificate of Registration (Part I or Part II) and a valid Practising Certificate issued by the Nursing Council of Hong Kong;
2. one of the following qualifications or equivalent:
 - (a) a certificate of health nursing (awarded by the Hong Kong Government in or before 1992);
 - (b) a diploma in public health nursing studies (awarded by the Hong Kong Government between 1993 and 2001);
 - (c) a degree in bachelor of nursing (awarded by an approved post-secondary institution in Hong Kong in or after 2004);
 - (d) a degree in master of nursing (awarded by an approved post-secondary institution in Hong Kong in or after 2007); and
3. five years of experience as a practising registered nurse (including at least two years of service in aided special school(s)).

Pay:

The pay is pegged to the pay points of the civil service post of Nursing Officer, i.e. from Civil Service Master Pay Scale Points 26 to 33A.

Conditions of service:

As school specialist staff, Nursing Officers are entitled to the terms of appointment and benefits (including leave, arrangements for retirement, etc.) and relief applicable to school specialist staff remunerated by the Salaries Grant, as set out in the relevant Codes of Aid.

Cash Grant for Auxiliary Staff in Aided Special Schools

Use of grant

1. The Cash Grant for Auxiliary Staff in Aided Special Schools comprises the Cash Grant for Teacher Assistant, the Cash Grant for Cook, the Cash Grant for School Bus Driver and the Cash Grant for Watchman^{Note}. These four grants, all outside the ambit of the Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEBG)/the Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant (EOEBG), are designated for hiring the respective qualified temporary staff. All employment-related expenses, including salary, leave entitlement, statutory benefits such as Mandatory Provident Fund contributions, long service payment and severance payment, as well as relief arrangements, are covered by the grants, and no additional funding will be provided for schools to meet the expenses incurred by the appointment of the above-mentioned staff.

Administrative arrangements

2. Cash grants converted from frozen posts of teacher assistant/cook/school bus driver/watchman will be disbursed to schools in two instalments (i.e. in September and March every school year).

3. Schools that wish to apply for the Cash Grant for Auxiliary Staff are required to act in accordance with the following administrative arrangements:

- (a) To capitalise on the flexibility of converting vacant posts of teacher assistant/cook/school bus driver/watchman within their approved establishment into cash grants, schools are required to obtain the prior consent of their Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) and the majority of their teacher assistants/cooks/school bus drivers/watchmen. The deployment of the Cash Grant for Auxiliary Staff must be endorsed by the IMC and communicated to the school staff.
- (b) Schools are required to complete the application form and submit it to the Education Bureau (EDB) within the designated school year. The application form is available on the EDB website (EDB Home > Education System and Policy > Special Education > Support for Schools > Special School > Cash Grant for Auxiliary Staff in Aided Special Schools) (<http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/education/system/special/support-subsidy/special-school/Cash-Grant-for-Auxiliary->

^{Note} Apart from hiring the respective qualified temporary staff, schools may also use the Cash Grant for Watchman to procure security services for their boarding section.

[Staff/index.html](#))

- (c) When employing the respective qualified temporary staff with these cash grants, schools are not required to submit the appointment forms to the EDB. Nevertheless, when procuring security services for the boarding section with the Cash Grant for Watchman, schools are required to observe the requirements set out in the relevant EDB circular(s) on aided schools' procurement.
- (d) Schools are required to ensure that the cash grant is sufficient to cover the related expenses. If a deficit is incurred, it should first be topped up by the surplus under the EOEBG/the General Domain of the OEBG. If there remains a deficit, it should be made up by the school funds accounts.
- (e) Since the provision of such cash grants aims to accord greater flexibility to schools in deploying their resources to provide students with auxiliary support in a timely manner, schools in principle should not retain the surplus of such cash grants. However, in view of the operational needs of schools, they are allowed to retain a surplus up to 30% of the 12 months' provision of each grant at the end of each school year. Year-end surplus not exceeding this cap can be carried forward to the next school year, but its use should be confined to the permitted scope of the respective grants. Any surplus above the cap should be clawed back by the EDB. Transfer of funds/unspent balance under these cash grants to other accounts is not allowed.
- (f) Schools are required to keep a separate ledger account for these cash grants to duly record the income and expenditure of all relevant items and maintain such income and expenditure records.
- (g) The IMC of the school is required to be accountable for the proper use of all public resources, including the above-mentioned cash grants.