

Education Bureau Circular No. 10/2021

**Teachers' Continuing Professional Development in
Catering for Students with Special Educational Needs**

[Note: This circular should be read by

- (a) Supervisors and heads of all primary schools, secondary schools and special schools – for necessary action; and
- (b) Heads of sections – for information]

Summary

This circular informs public sector ordinary schools and aided special schools of the arrangements for teacher training programmes in special education starting from the 2021/22 school year. These arrangements seek to enhance teachers' professional capacity in catering for students with special educational needs (SEN) and address teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) needs. Education Bureau (EDB) Circular No. 12/2015 dated 10 July 2015 is hereby superseded.

Details

Ordinary Schools

2. To tie in with the three-tier intervention model advocated by the EDB for helping students with SEN and enhance teachers' professional capacity in catering for these students, the EDB launched a teacher professional development framework on integrated education (IE) in the 2007/08 school year. Under this framework, structured training programmes pitched at three levels, i.e. Basic, Advanced and Thematic Courses (BAT Courses), are conducted for serving teachers and training targets are set. Each school is expected to arrange teachers to take these professional development programmes on catering for students with SEN in accordance with the training targets, so that teachers can work in collaboration to facilitate their schools' implementation of IE through the Whole School Approach (WSA).

3. By the end of the 2020/21 school year¹, around 43% of public sector ordinary primary school teachers and 33% of public sector ordinary secondary school teachers have received training in special education² for 30 hours or more.

4. After reviewing the training targets and arrangements of the BAT Courses, the training progress of public sector ordinary school teachers, the types and numbers of students with SEN and the views of stakeholders, the EDB has set new training targets for schools with the provision of a new round of the BAT Courses for the school years from 2021/22 to 2026/27. By the end of the 2026/27 school year, each public sector ordinary school should have achieved the following training targets:

- (i) at least 80% of teachers will have completed the Basic Course;
- (ii) at least 20% of teachers will have completed the Advanced Course; and
- (iii) at least 25% of teachers will have completed the Thematic Courses (with two or more teachers having completed all courses under “Cognition and Learning Needs” and “Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development Needs”, and with one or more teachers having completed all courses under “Sensory, Communication and Physical Needs”).

5. Schools are expected to appropriately formulate their own CPD plans for teachers, having regard to the training targets set out above, and systematically arrange teachers to receive training in special education, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching force in catering for students with SEN.

6. Schools should also take note of the new arrangements for the BAT Courses, which include the following: (i) while places are offered on a first-come-first-served basis, the EDB will exercise discretion to accord priority to admit the teachers from schools with a greater need to study the relevant courses; (ii) the Basic Course will be conducted by modules online, and a fixed quota will be reserved for each school every school year to facilitate orderly arrangements of teachers to take the Course within a period of six school years; (iii) to enhance learning effectiveness, teachers are required to have successfully completed the Basic Course before proceeding to the Advanced

¹ According to Education Bureau Circular No. 12/2015, the training targets to be achieved by each public sector ordinary school by the end of the 2019/20 school year are set as follows:

- (i) at least 15% to 25% of teachers will have completed the Basic Course;
- (ii) at least six to nine teachers will have completed the Advanced Course; and
- (iii) at least six to nine teachers will have completed the Thematic Courses (with the course(s) under each category completed by at least one teacher as far as possible).

Owing to the COVID-19 epidemic, most of the training programmes scheduled for the 2019/20 school year have been postponed. The training cycle has been extended to the end of the 2020/21 school year accordingly.

² The percentages can only be finalised when the universities that organise the BAT Courses have completed the evaluation of all teacher participants.

Course and are encouraged to complete the Basic Course before taking any Thematic Courses; and (iv) the “Professional Development Programme for Mental Health” launched for primary and secondary school teachers in the 2017/18 school year, which comprises a three-day elementary training and a five-day in-depth training, will be incorporated into the Thematic Courses of the BAT Courses. Contents of the BAT Courses are outlined below:

Basic Course

With a duration of some 30 hours, this course consists of the development of IE and principles, theories and practices applicable to teaching strategies, curriculum and assessment accommodations for catering for students with diverse learning needs. It aims at helping teachers better grasp the appropriate strategies and skills to provide tiered support for students with SEN under the three-tier intervention model. Teachers must successfully complete the entire course within three months and finish their assignments or fulfill other relevant requirements. Every school year, schools should also make arrangements for teachers who have completed or who are taking the Basic Course to attend the EDB’s experience sharing sessions on IE, during which teachers are invited to talk about their practical experience while instructors of the online Basic Course will share insights with teachers and answer questions about the course content and problems encountered in teaching students with SEN.

Advanced Course

With a duration of some 72 hours, this course comprises 10 days of face-to-face classes and four half-day sessions of supervised practicum. It covers topics like the promotion with the WSA, development of an inclusive culture, formulation of school-based policies, and implementation of support measures. It also helps teachers gain a more in-depth understanding of the learning needs of students with SEN and the corresponding support strategies, in order to further enhance teachers’ professional capacity. Upon completion of face-to-face classes, teachers are required to return to their own school for participation in supervised practicum, which involves the planning and design of an action research on catering for students with SEN. Since completion of the Basic Course (30 hours) is a prerequisite for enrolment in the Advanced Course, teachers will have actually received training for 102 hours under the framework of the BAT Courses by the time they have completed the Advanced Course.

Thematic Courses

The Thematic Courses aim at better equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to cater for students with different types of SEN, so that more focused support can be rendered to these students. With reference to the existing framework, the Thematic Courses are grouped under three main categories according to the educational needs of students. Under each category, courses focusing on different types of SEN are offered, each with a duration of 60 to 72 hours. Outlined below are nine courses that will be offered under the three categories:

(a) Cognition and Learning Needs

Focusing on:

1. students with Specific Learning Difficulties; and
2. academically low achievers (including those with Intellectual Disability)

(b) Behavioural, Emotional and Social Development Needs

Focusing on:

3. students with Autism Spectrum Disorder;
4. students with Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder; and
5. students with Mental Illness

(c) Sensory, Communication and Physical Needs

Focusing on:

6. students with Physical Disability;
7. students with Visual Impairment;
8. students with Hearing Impairment; and
9. students with Speech and Language Impairment

Special Schools

7. Starting from the 2012/13 school year, the EDB has organised the “Training Course for Special School Teachers” (TCSST) on supporting students with more severe or multiple disabilities for special school teachers. With 240-hour theory-based lectures and a six-month practicum, the TCSST comprises four modules, namely (i) theories, principles and practices in special education; (ii) academic and learning support; (iii) behavioural, emotional, and social development support; and (iv) sensory, communication and physical support. For practicum, instructors will organise lesson observation cum post-lesson discussion, project work, experience sharing sessions, etc., to help teachers apply what they have learnt in class.

8. In general, the community has higher expectation of the professional qualification in special education acquired by special school teachers. In consultation with the Hong Kong Special Schools Council and the principals and teachers of special schools, we consider it necessary to set a specific training target so that special schools can work out plans accordingly for teachers' study in the TCSST. In this regard, it is our target that each special school will have 85% or more teachers with special education qualification by the end of the 2023/24 school year. Given the positive feedback received from special school principals and teachers on the TCSST and the training target set, the EDB will continue to organise the TCSST with a duration of 240 hours and encourage schools to arrange teachers to receive training in a systematic manner in order that the training target could be achieved by the end of the 2023/24 school year.

9. In addition, starting from the 2021/22 school year, the EDB will commission tertiary institutions to organise a part-time "Leadership Development Programme for Middle Leaders of Special Schools" (LDP-MLSS) in order to strengthen the professional leadership of special schools' middle management for more effective engagement of school teachers and non-teaching professional staff in collaboration to promote school development. With a duration of about 30 hours, LDP-MLSS mainly covers management, planning and coordination in special schools, and transdisciplinary collaboration among the personnel of the school section and the boarding section (if applicable).

Other Training Programmes

10. As principals of ordinary schools play a pivotal role in leading their teaching teams in implementing IE, they need to stay abreast of the latest development of IE policies and practices so that they can formulate school-based policies and practices for implementing the WSA to IE, foster a caring and inclusive school culture, and enhance the effectiveness of IE. The EDB has already included the major elements of IE, such as the five basic principles, operation of the WSA, deployment of additional resources, planning of professional support and arrangements for teacher training, in the module on IE of the "Preparation for Principalship Course", so as to help the aspiring principals acquire the skills for formulating school-based IE policies.

11. The Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) of ordinary schools are required to lead the student support team and provide dedicated support for the principal and the vice-principal(s) in planning, coordinating and implementing the WSA to IE. To enhance the professional competence of SENCOs, the EDB organises

the “Professional Development Programme for Special Educational Needs Coordinators” with a duration of approximately 120 hours for SENCOs who have not yet received relevant training. The content of this Programme covers leadership, planning and management, student-centred support strategies, lesson study, provision mapping and management, etc., so as to enable SENCOs to exercise the leadership role more effectively, arrange appropriate support to students strategically, strengthen collaboration with subject panels at different levels, promote home-school cooperation further and develop an inclusive school culture.

12. Ordinary schools generally deploy funding flexibly to employ teaching assistants to assist teachers in catering for students with SEN. For special schools, they will assign teacher assistants within the approved establishment and employ teaching assistants as appropriate to assist teachers in arranging learning activities and providing support for students. Every school year, the EDB holds a two-day workshop on “Catering for Diverse Learning Needs” to help teaching assistants and teacher assistants acquire basic knowledge of special education and understand the diverse learning needs of students with SEN as well as the support skills required.

13. Furthermore, the EDB will continue to organise seminars, workshops and experience-sharing sessions related to special education and IE for teachers and other school personnel on a need basis. We will upload the details of relevant programmes and professional development activities onto the EDB Training Calendar [<http://tcs.edb.gov.hk/>] in a timely manner. The content and delivery mode of such training programmes and professional development activities will also be reviewed in due course and adjusted in light of the feedback from schools and the development of special education and IE.

Profiles on Teacher Training in Special Education

14. A module of “Profiles on Teacher Training in Special Education” has been newly created in the Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS). Schools are advised to make good use of the function of this module on SEMIS to regularly monitor the training in special education received by their teachers and make orderly arrangements for the teachers to take the relevant training programmes. The teachers enrolled in the training programmes on special education are required to attend and complete such programmes as required by the course organisers. We will also monitor teachers’ training progress at school level and offer advice, if necessary, to help ordinary schools and special schools achieve the respective training targets set out in paragraphs 4 and 8.

Eligibility for Promotion

15. For public sector school teachers having successfully completed the Basic, Advanced or Thematic Courses, with the acceptance and endorsement of the school management committees (SMCs) / incorporated management committees (IMCs), the courses taken can be counted towards the training hours required for the Elective Part of the enhanced training requirements for promotion³.

16. For aided special school teachers, starting from the 2012/13 school year, successful completion of the TCSST or a combination of the BAT Courses up to 240 hours, or equivalent, will be recognised as having special education qualification obtained by special school teachers for promotion purpose. Yet this will not affect aided special school teachers who have already completed relevant training courses recognised as having the special education qualification for promotion purpose before the 2012/13 school year. Furthermore, if aided special school teachers have successfully completed the LDP-MLSS, with the acceptance and endorsement of the SMCs / IMCs, the programme taken can be counted towards the training hours required for the Elective Part of the enhanced training requirements for promotion³ in meeting the eligibility for substantive promotion to a higher rank in special schools.

Provision of Supply Teachers

17. Regular teachers of government and aided schools (including special schools) will be granted paid study leave⁴ for attending teacher professional development programmes on special education (including the aforesaid Advanced Course, Thematic Courses, Professional Development Programme for SENCOs and TCSST) conducted in a full-time block-release mode. Schools will receive a supply teacher grant for the period concerned for hiring supply teachers. The supply teacher grant will be disbursed to government schools and aided schools without an IMC according to the established procedures. For aided schools with an IMC, they can apply for reimbursement to cover the salaries of supply teachers by completing a claim form, which can be downloaded from the following webpage:

sense.edb.gov.hk > [Professional Development of Teachers](#) > [Teacher Professional Development on Catering for Students with Special Educational Needs](#)

³ For details of the enhanced training requirements for promotion applicable to ordinary schools and special schools, please refer to EDB Circular No. 6/2020 or relevant circulars updated in future.

⁴ Paid study leave does not apply to the supervised practicum of the TCSST as the practicum takes place at irregular intervals in the school served by the teacher concerned and in the schools of other participants.



18. Schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) must also cater for students with SEN appropriately. Likewise, these schools are required to arrange their teachers to attend the BAT Courses according to the training targets set out in paragraph 4 above. The expenditure on supply teachers has been subsumed under the DSS unit subsidy and therefore no separate application is required.

Enquiries

19. For enquiries, please contact the Special Education Support 2 Section on 3698 3729.

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