

26 January 2022

Education Bureau Circular No. 2/2022

**Extension of Years of Study
for Students of Aided Special Schools**

[Note: This circular should be read by

- (a) Supervisors and heads of all aided schools for children with intellectual disability, schools for children with physical disability, schools for children with visual impairment and the school for children with hearing impairment – for action; and
- (b) Supervisors and heads of other aided special schools and heads of sections – for information.]

Summary

This circular updates and reminds all aided special schools of the arrangement on extension of years of study for students. It supersedes the Education Bureau (EDB) Circular No. 3/2010 issued on 5 March 2010.

Background

2. Aided special schools provide students with free basic education and senior secondary education, in which they offer a 12-year academic structure (including 6 years of primary education, 3 years of junior secondary education and 3 years of senior secondary education) for their students with intellectual disability (ID) and students with visual impairment (VI). As for students with normal intelligence pursuing ordinary curriculum in the school for children with hearing impairment (HI) and schools for children with physical disability (PD), it is an academic structure of 13-year (including 10 years of basic education and 3 years of senior secondary education).

3. It is a norm that students complete their primary and secondary education under the respective academic structures. There are, however, special circumstances where individual students may need to extend their years of study due to various valid reasons. All along, we have a mechanism in place to allow individual students in need to extend their stay at school. To tie in with the implementation of the Senior Secondary Curriculum under the New Academic Structure and to make the mechanism on extension of years of study more responsive to the actual needs of students and the operation of special schools, the EDB has implemented measures on extension of years of study starting from the 2010/11 school year after thorough and in-depth consultation with the special education sector, parents and other stakeholders. Under normal circumstances, special school students will graduate from school upon completion of Secondary 6. For those who need to extend their years of study, arrangements will be made in accordance with the established mechanism. Details are set out below.

Details

4. Under the measures on extension of years of study, the EDB has, starting from the 2010/11 school year, been providing a “pre-set quota” for schools for children with ID, schools for children with PD, the school for children with HI, and the school for children with VI cum ID so that they can have sufficient capacity to cater for students who need to extend their years of study. With such measures in place, schools are allowed to exercise school-based professional judgement and arrange for students with at least one “valid reason” in a particular school year to extend their years of study according to the objective criteria jointly set by the EDB and the sector. Upon the full operation of classes in senior secondary levels of the school for children with VI in the 2021/22 school year, the measures on extension of years of study are also applicable to this special school from the 2022/23 school year onwards.

“Pre-set quota”

5. The number of additional school places provided for each type of special schools is, in principle, determined by the percentage of “pre-set quota” and the approved capacity in a standard size school¹. The “pre-set quota” for various types of special schools is as follows:

¹ With reference to the academic structure of the respective types of special schools, there are 12 classes for schools for children with ID, schools for children with VI and schools for children with VI cum ID, and 13 classes for schools for children with HI and schools for children with PD (which admit both children with normal intelligence and children with ID whose major disability is PD).

School Type		Percentage of “Pre-set Quota”	Number of Additional School Places
Schools for children with ID	Mild ID	8%	15
	Moderate ID	10%	12
	Severe ID	12%	12
School for children with VI cum ID		12%	14
Schools for children with PD		Adapted curriculum: 12% Ordinary curriculum: 18%	Not less than 20
School for children with HI		18%	23
School for children with VI		18%	26

6. For schools for children with ID that operate two sections (e.g. schools for children with mild and moderate ID), if they are approved to operate 6 or more classes in both sections, the additional school places will be calculated on the basis of the percentages for the respective school types separately. Otherwise, the overall additional school places will be calculated on the basis of the percentage for the school type that the section is approved to operate more classes. For the school operating three sections catering for children with mild, moderate and severe ID concurrently, the number of additional school places will be calculated by the percentages of “pre-set quota” for the respective school types on the basis that the three sections each operate six classes.

7. For PD schools admitting both children with normal intelligence and children with ID, the additional school places will, in principle, be calculated on the basis of the approved capacity in standard size schools at 18% and 12% respectively for classes offering the ordinary curriculum and the adapted curriculum, provided that the number of additional school places will not be less than 20.

“Valid reasons” for extension of years of study

8. The three “valid reasons” jointly set by the EDB and the sector are as follows:

(i) **Frequent absence from school**

Absence from school for more than one-third of the total school days in the school

year due to valid reasons such as suffering from illness, undergoing surgery, representing Hong Kong in competitions and attending group training;

(ii) **Major disruptions in learning**

Though present at school, the students' learning in the school year is substantially disrupted by factors such as persistent and severe emotional problems, abrupt deterioration in body functioning, regular therapeutic treatments, prolonged drug influence etc.; or

(iii) **Serious adaptation problems**

The students admitted in the school year experience serious adaptation problems due to their learning backgrounds and language environments, etc. (for example, newly arrived children and non-Chinese speaking students).

9. The three "valid reasons" cover most of the situations in which students need to extend their years of study. However, we understand that a small number of students may wish to extend their years of study under special circumstances not covered by these three "valid reasons". For such cases, schools could, after making arrangement for students with such a need and "valid reasons" to extend their years of study, exercise school-based professional judgement according to objective criteria and allow individual students to extend their years of study by making use of any residual quota. In principle, the residual quota is exclusive to students who are due to leave school in the current school year with a need for extension.

10. We have to emphasise that the number of additional school places provided under the measures on extension of years of study is the maximum limit. Schools should consider each application prudently and it is not necessary to use up these additional school places. For students experiencing difficulties or disruptions in the learning process, schools should provide guidance and remedial support as appropriate. Extension of years of study is not the only option for assisting students, nor is it necessarily the best way. It is an exception rather than a norm. If a student has been allowed to extend his/her years of study before and it is considered that there are genuine and sufficient justifications for further extension after prudent deliberation, the school should refer the case to the Incorporated Management Committee for a final decision, together with sufficient evidence and explanations. From the education perspective, special schools should provide students with education that meets their needs at different developmental stages. The number of approval for extension of years of study arranged for a student should not be

excessive. Otherwise, if the student's academic structure status differs greatly from that of his/her same-aged peers, or the difference even exceeds one Key Stage² in the extreme case, it may not be conducive to the physical and psychological development of the student.

School-based mechanism

11. While allowing schools to exercise professional judgment on extension of years of study for students, we must ensure that sound and proper school-based procedures are in place for the optimal use of resources. To this end, schools should establish a fair, evidence-based and transparent school-based mechanism, and exercise their professional judgement on each application for extension of years of study according to objective criteria and the additional school places available in each school year. Schools should also establish an appeal mechanism to handle parents' enquiries and concerns properly. The school-based mechanism for handling the extension of years of study should be approved by the Incorporated Management Committee. To ensure a certain degree of consistency among special schools in their practice, the EDB has, in consultation with the sector, developed the "Guidelines for Special Schools on School-based Mechanism for Handling the Extension of Years of Study for Students" for implementation by special schools. Details are at the Appendix. The guidelines are available on the EDB website, and they will be subject to review and revision when necessary (<https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/special-education/duration-of-study-in-special-schools-and-extension-of-years-of-study.html>).

Monitoring

12. In processing applications for extension of years of study, special schools should make proper use of the additional school places. In case any unreasonable arrangement is found, the EDB will demand justifications and supporting documents from the schools, and where appropriate, instruct the schools to rectify the situation. As such, special schools should comply with the following requirements:

- (a) Each year when schools propose the class organization for the following school year to the EDB, they should also submit the information on the students intended to be approved for extension of years of study for EDB's consideration in approving the number of classes for the following school year;

² The 4 stages of schooling from primary to secondary: Key Stage 1 (Primary 1 to Primary 3), Key Stage 2 (Primary 4 to Primary 6), Key Stage 3 (Secondary 1 to Secondary 3) and Key Stage 4 (Secondary 4 to Secondary 6).

- (b) Schools should keep on file documents supporting the decisions to allow the students to extend their years of study for inspection by the EDB and/or other departments. Such documents include reports by medical professionals/other specialists, school records of case conferences on the students and teaching plans for handling the students' problems, etc.; and
- (c) Schools should report to the EDB, through SEMIS³ each school year, the academic structure status⁴ of all students to enable its examination of the profile of each student. Such information includes the class level assigned, any approval for extension of years of study and the reasons.

Provision of support for prospective school leavers

13. The EDB has been providing resources and support for special schools to help students develop their potential and make preparation for their further studies or post-school arrangements. Special schools should holistically and flexibly deploy various subsidies and manpower, to promote multi-disciplinary collaboration and guide students in life planning from the perspective of whole-person development. Specifically, when students approach the senior secondary stage, special schools should discuss with parents the post-school arrangements of the students and assist parents in applying for appropriate post-school services, with a view to working for the students' long-term well-being together. Schools should help parents understand that it is not the best way to render support by repeatedly extending the years of study of students who are at or beyond the age of leaving school. Schools should enhance the training of students' independent living skills in light of their personal growth, and work with parents to make early preparation for students' post-school arrangements for the sake of smooth transition into adulthood as well as integration into the community.

Enquiries

14. For enquiries about the extension of years of study, please contact the Special Education

³ SEMIS stands for Special Education Management Information System.

⁴ Special schools should assign each student with an academic structure status at the time of admission (including admission at the beginning of and during the school year) upon comprehensive and thorough consideration of such factors as the student's ability, background and number of years of education received. The status, once assigned, should not be altered without good reasons. In general, the status of a student at the time of admission should be the same as that of his/her same-aged peers. Only under exceptional circumstances are schools allowed to adjust this status. After admission, the status should be adjusted upward on a one-grade-per-year basis. If a student is granted permission to extend his/her years of study in a particular school year due to special circumstances, his/her academic structure status will remain unchanged in the following school year.

Support 1 Section. For enquiries about students' academic structure status and support for prospective school leavers, please contact the Special Education Support 2 Section.

Mrs Gloria LI
for Secretary for Education

Guidelines for Special Schools on School-based Mechanism for Handling the Extension of Years of Study for Students

(for implementation by aided schools for children with intellectual disability (ID), schools for children with physical disability (PD), schools for children with visual impairment (VI) and the school for children with hearing impairment (HI))

(A) Basic Principles

1. Students should graduate from school upon completion of Secondary 6 under the respective academic structures. The norm is that students with ID and students with VI complete primary and secondary education in 12 years; and students with normal intelligence pursuing ordinary curriculum in the school for children with HI and schools for children with PD complete primary and secondary education in 13 years.
2. Individual students may need to extend their years of study due to “valid reasons”¹, and schools are provided with a “pre-set quota” of additional places to address such needs.
3. For cases where individual students need to extend their years of study due to other reasons, schools have to exercise their school-based professional judgement according to the objective criteria and the number of residual quota available. In principle, residual quota should normally be used to cater for students who are due to leave school in the current school year with a need for extension.
4. Schools have to consider each case prudently according to the objective criteria to ensure the “pre-set quota” is used properly. It is not necessary for schools to use up the additional school places in each school year. Neither should they exceed the quota in any case.
5. Schools should provide students with education services that meet their needs at different developmental stages. The number of approval for extension of years of study arranged for a student should not be excessive. Otherwise, if the student’s academic structure status differs greatly from that of his/her same-aged peers, or the difference even exceeds one Key Stage in the extreme case, it might not be conducive to the physical and psychological development of the student.

(B) School-based Mechanism

Schools must ensure that proper and sound school-based procedures are in place for the optimal use of resources. To this end, schools should establish a fair, evidence-based and transparent school-based mechanism, and exercise their professional judgment on each application for extension of years of study according to objective criteria and the additional school places available in each school year.

(i) Screening of students

Schools should make a preliminary decision as to whether it is necessary to extend a student’s

¹ The three “valid reasons” are objective criteria that have been set after the Education Bureau had numerous deliberations with the sector and parents.

years of study after reviewing his/her learning progress and needs through a meeting (hereinafter called the “Student Progression Meeting”). The meeting must be held in or before March in each school year and information on students who will leave school or extend their years of study should be submitted to the Education Bureau (EDB) via the Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) according to the date set by the EDB. Normally, the date will be set at March in each school year.

(ii) Attendees at the Student Progression Meeting

School head, teachers and specialists.

(iii) Mechanism on decision-making

The decision on whether it is necessary to extend a student’s years of study should be made by all the attendees according to the objective criteria. In case no consensus can be reached after thorough professional deliberations, a decision may be made by voting. In case of a tie in voting, the chairperson of the meeting will make the final decision.

(iv) Appeal mechanism on extension of years of study

1. The parents or guardians appeal to the school supervisor in writing;
2. The school supervisor and two school managers² form an appeal panel to make the final decision (The school head has to give a clear description of the background to the panel, including the objective criteria used in the school-based mechanism and the condition of the students concerned, etc.);
3. The school supervisor informs the parents of the result of appeal in writing or by other means acceptable to the parents within two weeks after receipt of the appeal.

(v) “Valid reasons” for extension of years of study

1. **Frequent absence from school:** Absence from school for more than one-third of the total school days in the school year due to valid reasons such as suffering from illness, undergoing surgery, representing Hong Kong in competitions and attending group training;
2. **Major disruptions to learning:** Though present at school, the students’ learning in the school year is substantially disrupted by factors such as persistent and severe emotional problems, abrupt deterioration in body functioning, regular therapeutic treatments, prolonged drugs influence; or
3. **Serious adaptation problems:** The students admitted in the school year experience serious adaptation problems due to their learning backgrounds and language environments, etc. (for example, newly arrived children and non-Chinese speaking students).

(vi) Objective criteria for considering the use of residual quota

Students may wish to extend their years of study under special circumstances not covered by the three “valid reasons”. Schools may consider such cases on individual merits and make

² The EDB encourages schools to invite parent manager(s) to sit on the appeal panel.

use of the residual quota, if any, to allow the students to extend their years of study after taking into account a basket of factors. **In principle, the residual quota should normally be used to cater for students who are due to leave school in the current school year.** In assessing students' learning needs, schools may consider the following:

1. Learning ability and progress
2. Professional assessment reports
3. Post-school arrangements
4. Family circumstances (e.g. abrupt changes in family circumstances)
5. Age of the student
6. Behaviour and emotion
7. Learning motivation
8. Schooling history before admission (e.g. students admitted during the school year)
9. Health condition
10. Others (Please provide details, e.g. failure to achieve the expected learning outcomes)

(vii) Points to note

- Schools should keep on file relevant documentary proof, including reports prepared by medical professionals/other specialists (e.g. psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist and social worker), vocational assessment reports, school records of case conferences on the students and teaching plans for handling the students' problems, etc. for inspection by the EDB and/or other departments.
- If a student has been allowed to extend his/her years of study before and the Student Progression Meeting considers that there are genuine and sufficient justifications for further extension after prudent deliberations, the school must, having regard to the actual availability of the "pre-set quota", refer the case to the Incorporated Management Committee for a final decision, together with sufficient evidence and explanations.

(C) Revision of the List of Students with Extension of Years of Study

Under normal circumstances, schools should submit the list of students approved for extension of years of study according to the date set by the EDB (which is normally in March of each school year) and should not make subsequent changes to the list. If there is/are student(s) meeting the following conditions, schools with residual quotas may put up requests for including such student(s) in the list of students approved for extension of years of study:

1. A rejected application that has been subsequently approved for extension of years of study after the appeal was accepted; or
2. After the school's submission of the list of students approved for extension of years of study in March, a student has been absent from school frequently owing to valid reasons and thus meets the criteria for extension of years of study; or
3. After the school's submission of the list of students approved for extension of years of study in March, there has been a significant change in the condition of a student which creates a major disruption in his/her learning and he/she thus meets the criteria for extension of years of study; or

4. After the final examination, a student pursuing the ordinary curriculum has been confirmed by the school to have highly unsatisfactory learning results and hence needs an extension of years of study; or
5. The students due to leave school in the current school year have already been put on the waiting list for extension of years of study after deliberation under the school-based mechanism.

Schools should submit written information of the respective revised cases to the EDB **on or before 1 August of each school year**. Late submission will normally not be accepted. Schools have to provide full justifications for each case, and prove the necessity of the students concerned for extension of years of study through the Student Progression Meeting. For cases requiring further extension of years of study, the final decision has to be made by the Incorporated Management Committee.

(Revised edition, January 2022)