

16 April 2024

## **Education Bureau Circular No. 12/2024**

### **Enhancement for Supporting Students Comorbid with Autism Spectrum Disorder 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**

This circular informs aided special schools (special schools) of the details about the enhancement of staff provision of resource teachers for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (hereinafter referred to as “RT(A)”).

#### **Background**

2. To support students comorbid with ASD in special schools, the Education Bureau (EDB) provides these schools with additional RT(A) post(s) to implement the Resource Teaching Programme for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Special Schools<sup>1</sup> (RTP). The staffing arrangement for RT(A) has been enhanced since the 2017/18 school year; and the RTP, initially implemented in schools for children with mild intellectual disability (ID) and schools for children with moderate ID, was extended in the 2019/20 school year to cover schools for children with severe ID, schools for children with physical disability, school for children with hearing impairment, and schools for children with visual impairment, with a view to strengthening their support for students comorbid with ASD.

#### **Enhancement Measures**

3. As announced by the Chief Executive in the 2023 Policy Address, EDB will enhance the staff provision of RT(A) for primary section and secondary section of special schools, and extend the provision to cover schools for social development (SSDs) starting from the 2024/25 school year, so as to facilitate special schools to provide students comorbid with ASD with additional support in learning and

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<sup>1</sup> The Guide on the Resource Teaching Programme for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Special Schools (RTP Guide) (Chinese version only) can be downloaded from the “SENSE” website of EDB (<https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/types-of-special-educational-needs/autism-spectrum-disorder/resources/teaching-resources/245.html>).

development. The enhancement measures include:

- (i) improving the staffing arrangement: The RT(A) post(s) that a special school entitles will be equally allocated to the school's primary section and secondary section, at the ranks of Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress (APSM) or Graduate Master/Mistress (GM) respectively; and
- (ii) expanding the coverage of beneficiary schools: The staffing enhancement of RT(A) will be extended to cover SSDs to let students with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural difficulties comorbid with ASD receive stable and appropriate support.

4. The implementation of the aforesaid enhancement measures is subject to the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2024 by the Legislative Council.

### **Method of Calculation**

5. The number of additional regular RT(A) post(s) to be provided for a special school is calculated based on the total number of students comorbid with ASD in the school (i.e. including both primary section and secondary section). For every 6 students comorbid with ASD requiring RTP service, 0.5 RT(A) post will be provided. This means that a school with 6 to 11 students comorbid with ASD will be provided with 0.5 RT(A) post, while a school with 12 to 17 students comorbid with ASD will be provided with 1 RT(A) post, and so on. Starting from the 2024/25 school year, the number of RT(A) post(s) thus calculated will be equally allocated to the school's primary section and secondary section as follows:

- (i) the RT(A) post(s) will be equally allocated on a 0.5 post per unit basis to the school's primary section and secondary section at the ranks of APSM or GM respectively;
- (ii) the remaining 0.5 RT(A) post, if any, will be allocated to the section with more students comorbid with ASD; if the number of these students is the same in both primary section and secondary section, the remaining 0.5 RT(A) post will be allocated to the primary section; and
- (iii) the RT(A) post(s) for primary section and secondary section, along with other regular posts that can be used for calculation of promotion posts, will be counted towards the calculation of promotion post entitlement to arrive at the total number of promotion posts (i.e. Primary School Master/Mistress (PSM) posts for primary section and Senior Graduate Master/Mistress (SGM) posts for secondary section); any resultant fractional posts will be handled according to the existing practice<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For details, please refer to relevant remark in the letter on class organisation and staff establishment issued to aided special schools by EDB every school year.

6. Special schools are requested to holistically and flexibly deploy the resources and manpower to systematically formulate and implement “individualised education programmes” (IEP) under the Whole School Approach (WSA) principle to foster students’ learning and development. Schools are also required to timely review their students’ progress in various aspects to help them gradually achieve their IEP targets. Under the WSA principle, it is the professional duty of all teachers in a school to support students with special educational needs. Every teacher in a special school takes responsibility for the care and teaching of students comorbid with ASD, and this responsibility should not solely fall on RT(A)s. RT(A)s are not additional staff to share out teaching periods and duties with other teachers in the school. Their teaching tasks have to serve the purpose of supporting targeted students, such as supporting students comorbid with ASD in their learning, emotional well-being and behaviour through various means (e.g. collaborative teaching, in-class support and small group teaching). Moreover, since RT(A) post(s) will be counted towards the calculation of promotion posts as mentioned above, PSMs or SGMs holding relevant posts need to undertake leadership, co-ordination, supervision and other related duties to ensure that students comorbid with ASD receive appropriate support.

7. Schools are recommended to refer to the RTP Guide to provide additional learning and developmental support to students comorbid with ASD at various stages of growth. This support includes helping students enhance their motivation for learning as well as their comprehension and thinking skills, thereby enabling them to attain the learning level in accordance with their abilities. It also involves improving students’ social, communication and emotional management skills, enhancing their adaptability and self-reliance, and fostering socially acceptable behaviour. All these could help them realise their potential and facilitate their integration into the community. Under the enhancement measures, the RT(A) provision for the secondary section of special schools is improved. Schools should strengthen life planning education for students comorbid with ASD and collaboration with social welfare/commercial and industrial organisations to help students identify their own interests, capabilities and needs, guide them in life planning from a whole-person development perspective, and thereby prepare them for a smooth transition to adult life after leaving schools.

8. In connection with the above enhancement measures, corresponding amendments 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”. Relevant schools for children with ID will continue to be provided with teacher assistants based on the total number of RT(A) post(s) in the school (including both primary section and secondary section).

9. Upon the implementation of the above enhancement measures, there will be changes in the staff establishment of primary section and secondary section of special schools for the 2024/25 school year compared to that for the 2023/24 school year. The staff establishment for a school year may also change according to adjustments to the number of additional regular RT(A) post(s) that a school entitles. In the event that there are surplus teachers, schools must follow the relevant EDB circular memorandum (EDBCM) to make every effort to absorb the surplus teachers through internal redeployment. A school sponsoring body operating more than one school should arrange to redeploy its surplus teachers to fill the vacancies in other schools under its sponsorship as far as possible. For details, please refer to the relevant EDBCM on the arrangements for surplus teachers and laboratory technicians in aided secondary schools and special schools.

### **Evaluation and Accountability**

10. Under the enhanced School Development and Accountability framework, schools should follow a self-evaluation cycle of “Planning-Implementation-Evaluation” to promote school development on an ongoing basis. In this connection, special schools are required to include a report on using the resources related to student support measures (including the enhancement measures outlined in this circular) in their School Report of the respective school year. The School Reports, endorsed by the Incorporated Management Committee, should be uploaded onto the school website for the information of stakeholders (including school staff, parents and students).

### **Enquiries**

11. For enquiries about the above enhancement measures, please contact the Senior Inspector of the Special Education Support 1 Section at 3698 4272. For enquiries about staffing, appointment and administrative matters, please contact the respective Senior School Development Officers of your school.

Ms Mandy HO  
for Permanent Secretary for Education