

## Education Bureau Circular Memorandum No. 169/2020

From : Permanent Secretary for Education

To: Supervisors and heads of all government, aided (including special schools), caput schools and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme

Ref. : EDB (EID/ITE)/F&A/65/17/1 (1) C

Date : 10 November 2020

---

### Top-up Grant for Supporting Online Learning of Financially Needy Students

#### Purpose

This circular memorandum aims to inform all government, aided (including special schools), caput schools and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) of the details of the one-off Top-up Grant for Supporting Online Learning of Financially Needy Students (top-up grant). The grant provides additional support to **financially needy primary and secondary students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to their living environment.**

#### Details

##### *Background*

2. The Government has been disbursing Internet access subsidies (IAS) via the Student Finance Office (SFO) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to support students in eligible needy families<sup>1</sup> to acquire basic Internet services provided by fixed or mobile telecommunications services operators in the market. The full rate of IAS in the 2020/21 school year has been increased to \$1,600 per household.

3. Due to the volatile development of the COVID-19 epidemic, different extents of blended mode of learning, i.e. face-to-face classes, e-learning at home or other modes of learning, may become the new normal in teaching and learning. Some students are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to their living environment, e.g. subdivided units, old buildings and remote areas. The EDB has advised schools to flexibly deploy different grants, including the Composite Information Technology Grant (CITG)<sup>2</sup>, and follow the procurement procedures and guidelines set out in relevant regulations/circulars to purchase and lend portable WiFi routers and/or provide mobile data cards to the needy students for use in e-learning at home.

##### *Ambit and Arrangements*

4. To help schools strengthen the support for financially needy primary and secondary students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to their living environment, the EDB will disburse a one-off grant to subsidise schools the additional expenses incurred in purchasing portable WiFi routers and/or mobile data cards<sup>3</sup>. The beneficiaries are students who **do not have access to appropriate Internet services** (e.g. through fixed broadband services), covering students receiving subsidies under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) / School Textbook Assistance Scheme (STAS) and those with limited economic means identified by schools. To optimise the use of existing resources, schools are advised to realistically assess the genuine need before applying for the top-up grant. Schools wishing to apply for the top-up grant should refer to the guidance notes in the **Reply Slip** at Appendix as well as the Frequently Asked Questions at <https://www.edb.gov.hk/ited>, and duly complete the reply slip and return it to the IT in Education Section of the EDB by fax **on or before 30 November 2020 (Monday)** (Fax no.: 2382 4403 / 2382 6551). Schools should review the students' profile and identify those who

---

<sup>1</sup> Students who are receiving CSSA disbursed by SWD or full/half grant of STAS disbursed by SFO.

<sup>2</sup> At present, having regard to the operational needs for IT in education, schools can flexibly deploy different grants, including CITG, to purchase different software and hardware, such as portable WiFi routers and mobile data cards, for e-learning. In the 2020/21 school year, the rate of CITG for each school ranges from \$259,703 to \$847,319, depending on the school type and the number of classes. Please refer to the EDB Circular No. 13/2020 for details.

<sup>3</sup> Schools may flexibly deploy the grant for purchasing portable WiFi routers and/or mobile data cards to meet the needs of the students. For example, if a school has enough portable WiFi routers for lending to students, it may make use of the entire grant on acquiring mobile data cards.

may not have access to appropriate Internet services<sup>4</sup> or may require additional mobile data for e-learning at home. Schools may collect further information from parents to ascertain whether the support is needed. The top-up grant would be released tentatively by December 2020. The amount of the top-up grant for individual school will be calculated based on the unit rate of \$800 multiplied by the number of beneficiary students plus an additional 10% for schools to meet any unexpected demand within the ambits. Schools should remind beneficiary students that the mobile data is only for meeting learning and teaching needs. They should refrain from using the mobile data for other purposes unrelated to learning and teaching activities arranged by the school.

5. Applying schools should remind parents receiving IAS that they can use the IAS to meet the Internet access needs for e-learning at home for their children, for example, subscribing broadband Internet service or acquiring mobile data cards provided by operators of fixed or mobile telecommunications services. In case IAS cannot fully meet the needs, schools may also provide additional support with the top-up grant.

6. Aided, caput and DSS schools are required to record the loan information of WiFi routers for students in accordance with the School Administration Guide or other relevant guidelines. Government schools are required to follow the relevant internal guidelines in recording the loan information. Schools are also required to keep a record of the provision of mobile data cards to needy students.

### ***Accounting Arrangements and Procurement Requirements***

7. Schools are required to keep a separate ledger account to properly record all income and expenditure of the top-up grant. Transfer of funds and/or its unspent balance out of this grant is not allowed. If the top-up grant is depleted, schools may deploy the surplus under Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant (EOEBG) or the General Domain of the Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEBG) for aided schools, the Expanded Subject and Curriculum Block Grant (ESCBG) for government schools, the Caput Fee Subsidy for caput secondary schools and the DSS Subsidy for DSS schools to pay for the additional expenses incurred. If that is still not enough to cover the additional expenses, aided, caput and DSS schools would have to make use of the schools' own fund/non-government fund. All books of accounts, receipts, payment vouchers and invoices must be kept for at least 7 years by schools for accounting and auditing purposes. For government schools, any unspent balance as at 31 August 2021 will lapse. As for aided, caput and DSS schools, they should incorporate the income and expenditure in their annual audited accounts and submit to the EDB according to the prevailing practices. The EDB will clawback any unspent balance of the top-up grant as at 31 August 2021 based on schools' annual audited accounts.

8. For the procurement of stores and services, schools are required to follow proper procurement, accounting and financial control procedures as set out in EDB Circular No. 4/2013 and the School Administration Guide for aided schools and the Stores and Procurement Regulations and other relevant internal guidelines for government schools. Caput schools should follow the guidelines on procurement procedures for aided schools. DSS schools should follow the guidelines on procurement procedures for aided schools, or their own procurement policies formulated upon the endorsement of their School Management Committees/Incorporated Management Committees.

### ***Enquiry***

9. Schools can visit the EDB webpage at <https://www.edb.gov.hk/ited> for more information, e.g. Frequently Asked Questions and reference specifications on portable WiFi router. For enquiries, please contact the IT in Education Section at 3698 3603 or 3698 3606.

Ms Wendy Au  
for Permanent Secretary for Education

c.c. Heads of Sections - for information

---

<sup>4</sup> In general, students living in public housing estates in Hong Kong could acquire fixed broadband services through subscribing to telecommunications services provided in the market.

**Reply Slip**  
**Top-up Grant for Supporting Online Learning of Financially Needy Students**  
(Please return on or before 30 November 2020 by fax)

To: IT in Education Section (Fax: 2382 4403 / 2382 6551)

My school –

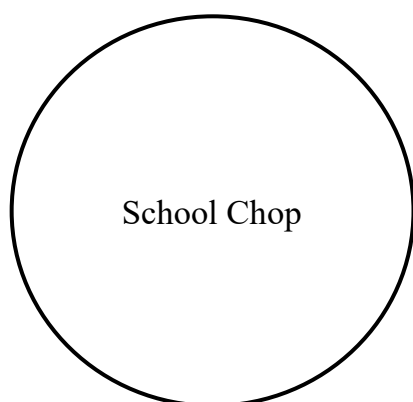
**wishes** to apply for the above top-up grant for subsidising the additional expenses incurred in purchasing portable WiFi routers and/or mobile data cards **for needy students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to their living environment**, including \_\_\_\_\_ students receiving subsidies under CSSA/STAS, and \_\_\_\_\_ students with limited economic means identified by my school.

**does not wish** to apply for the top-up grant.

*\* Please put a “✓” in  as appropriate.*

**Teacher In-charge**

Name: \*Mr/Ms \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_



Signature of Principal: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Principal: \_\_\_\_\_  
School Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
School Registration Number (six-digit): \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Guidance Notes:**

1. The beneficiaries refer to students who are unable to acquire appropriate Internet services due to their living environment, e.g. subdivided units, old buildings and remote areas, and receiving subsidies under CSSA/STAS or those with limited economic means identified by schools.
2. Schools are responsible for ensuring that the application reflects the actual situation as far as possible. The EDB may approach individual schools to clarify the number of beneficiary students provided through their respective Senior School Development Officers, if necessary. Schools should review the students' profile to identify those who may not have access to appropriate Internet services and may collect further information from parents to ascertain whether the additional support is needed. Please refer to Frequently Asked Questions provided at the relevant webpage (<https://www.edb.gov.hk/ited>) for details.
3. The amount of the top-up grant for individual school will be calculated based on the unit rate of \$800 multiplied by the number of the beneficiary students plus an additional 10% for schools to meet any unexpected demand within the ambits.