

29 March 2019

Education Bureau Circular No. 7/2019

Allocation of Learning Support Grant to Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools

[Note: This circular should be read by –

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

Summary

This circular sets out the arrangements for the allocation of the Learning Support Grant (LSG) to Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools from the 2019/20 school year onwards.

Background

2. The Education Bureau (EDB) has been providing schools with additional resources, professional support and teacher training to help them cater for students with special educational needs (SEN). The LSG is a major additional resource. Schools should holistically and flexibly deploy resources to cater for students' diverse learning needs through the 3-Tier Intervention Model:

- (a) Tier-1 support refers to early identification and catering for all students with diverse learning and adjustment needs, including those with mild or transient learning or adjustment difficulties through quality teaching in regular classroom;
- (b) Tier-2 support refers to additional support/“add-on” intervention, such as small group tutoring, after-school remedial programmes and pull-out programmes for students with persistent learning or adjustment difficulties; and
- (c) Tier-3 support refers to individualised intensive support for students with persistent and severe learning or adjustment difficulties including drawing up

of Individual Education Plans¹.

3. To help schools implement integrated education (IE), the EDB has all along included the LSG in the DSS unit subsidy.

Implementation details

4. To ensure that DSS schools admitting a comparatively large number of students with SEN are provided with a corresponding amount of additional resource, starting from the 2019/20 school year, the disbursement of the LSG to each DSS school will be based on the actual number of students with SEN² and academic low achievers (ALAs) (applicable to primary schools)³ enrolled in each DSS school, as well as the DSS LSG unit rate⁴, as a replacement for the practice set out in paragraph 3.

5. The DSS LSG unit rate is determined according to the LSG unit rates applicable to public sector ordinary schools⁵ in a school year and the percentage of students requiring tier-2 and tier-3 support in public sector ordinary schools in the preceding school year. In the 2019/20 school year, the DSS LSG unit rate will be \$17,520. The LSG grant rates for public sector ordinary schools will be adjusted annually in accordance with the change in the Composite Consumer Price Index, and the DSS LSG unit rate will also be adjusted accordingly.

6. The total amount of the LSG provided for each DSS school will be calculated according to the number of students with SEN and ALAs (applicable to primary schools) reported by the DSS school and the DSS LSG unit rate. For schools with provision of the LSG reaching or exceeding threshold 2⁶ mentioned in paragraph 10 of EDB Circular No. 6/2019, an additional grant equivalent to the mid-point salary of a graduate

¹ Please refer to Appendix 10 of the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education”.

² For the purpose of calculating the number of students with SEN in DSS schools, the types of SEN taken include: Specific Learning Difficulties, Intellectual Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Physical Disability, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment and Mental Illness. As regards the support for students with Speech and Language Impairment, the EDB will introduce the Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service, starting from the 2019/20 school year, to create school-based speech therapist posts in public sector ordinary primary and secondary schools by phases in three years. Under the new initiative, schools may form clusters to employ school-based speech therapists. Relevant resources will be subsumed under the DSS unit subsidy.

³ ALAs in primary schools refer to students whose academic attainment is backward by two or more years in at least two of the three key learning areas (i.e. Chinese, English and Mathematics) as assessed by teachers using the Learning Achievement Measurement Kit developed by the EDB.

⁴ Implementation of the enhancement measures for LSG is subject to the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2019 by the Legislative Council.

⁵ In the 2019/20 school year, the grant rates for students requiring tier-2 and tier-3 support in public sector ordinary schools will be \$15,000 and \$60,000 respectively.

⁶ In the 2019/20 school year, the amount specified for threshold 2 is \$1,600,000, which will be adjusted according to the change in the Composite Consumer Price Index thereafter.

teacher will be provided. For schools with provision of LSG reaching or exceeding threshold 3⁷ mentioned in the circular, an additional grant equivalent to the mid-point salary of two graduate teachers will be provided.

7. For the use of the LSG, please refer to Appendix 1. Schools should provide appropriate support according to the needs of students and draw up structured support plans for individual students requiring enhanced support. Relevant information and details of support measures are available in the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education”⁸.

Details of provision

8. In order to allow schools to estimate the amount of the LSG they will receive in each school year and facilitate their early planning of the support services for students, the EDB will provide the first allotment of the LSG for the new school year, amounting to 70% of the last school year’s entitled provision, in August before the commencement of each new school year. As for the second allotment of the LSG (i.e. the remaining amount after deduction of the first allotment), the EDB will disburse it to schools in March of each school year.

9. To enable the EDB to calculate the first allotment of the LSG for the 2019/20 school year, schools are required to submit SEN information of the students concerned⁹ who are enrolled in the 2018/19 school year, after obtaining the parental consent, via the Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) by 15 July 2019. The EDB will calculate the first allotment of the LSG that schools will receive in the 2019/20 school year on the basis of such information. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, schools are required to update the information of students with SEN and ALAs (applicable to primary schools) on SEMIS by 30 November of each school year to allow the EDB to calculate the amount of the LSG they are entitled to for the whole school year accordingly, and that the EDB will notify the schools of the amount they are entitled to in February. Schools’ whole-year entitlement will serve as the basis for calculating the first allotment of the LSG for the next school year.

10. Details of the funding procedures and payment schedule of the LSG are set out in Appendix 2.

⁷ In the 2019/20 school year, the amount specified for threshold 3 is \$2,200,000, which will be adjusted according to the changes in the amounts for threshold 1 and 2 thereafter.

⁸ Website: http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/special/support/wsa/ie%20guide_en.pdf

⁹ Schools are required to verify and, where necessary, update the information of the students concerned by making use of the Web-based School Administration and Management Systems or e-forms.

Evaluation and accountability

11. Schools should refer to the “Catering for Student Differences ~ Indicators for Inclusion”¹⁰ and the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education” compiled by the EDB for developing school-based inclusive culture, policy and practices. When planning for the use of the LSG to support students with SEN and ALAs, schools should discuss students’ needs with teachers and parents to ensure the effective use of resources. Under the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools should devise action plans for integrated education and embed the use of the LSG and the support for students with SEN in their regular self-evaluation mechanism. To enhance transparency, schools should also let parents and different stakeholders understand how schools support students with SEN and ALAs. In this connection, schools are required to give information on their implementation of the Whole School Approach to IE in the School Profiles. Schools also have to set out their policies, additional resources allocated, support services provided for students, etc. for implementing IE in their School Report which are to be uploaded onto their school websites.

12. Home-school co-operation is one of the elements that contributes to the success in the implementation of IE. Schools have to establish a systematic and regular communication mechanism to enhance communication and co-operation with parents, and invite parents to give views on the strategies for and effectiveness of supporting students with SEN. Schools may follow the recommendations set out in the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education” to brief newly admitted students and their parents on their IE policy and strategies for supporting students with SEN, so that parents may know how to complement schools. Schools should, in light of the needs of individual students, discuss with parents the arrangements for supporting their children, and conduct regular review on the learning progress of their children. In addition, schools should continue to promote and enhance the plan for developing inclusive school culture with a view to fostering among ordinary students and parents an understanding, acceptance of and respect for students with SEN, and thus fostering a harmonious and inclusive school culture.

13. For continuous monitoring and improvement of the use of LSG and its effectiveness, schools have to complete the “Year-end Evaluation Form on Whole School Approach to Catering for Students with SEN (applicable to DSS schools)”¹¹

¹⁰ Website: http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/special/support/wsa/indicators-082008_e.pdf

¹¹ Please refer to the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education”.

and return it to the EDB by 31 August each year. The EDB will arrange school visits by professional staff and organise training and inter-school sharing sessions of good practices, etc. to facilitate schools' optimal use of resources to cater for students with SEN and ALAs.

Accounting arrangements and surplus retention

14. Schools are required to keep a separate ledger account to record all income and expenditure under the LSG. Transfer of funds under this grant to other accounts is not allowed. Schools should adhere to the guidelines on submission of audited annual accounts set out in the relevant circular memoranda and submit their audited annual accounts to the EDB for inspection. Schools are also required to pay attention to the prevailing ordinances, regulations and circulars related to employment, procuring outside services and handling of accounts, etc.

15. Schools should fully utilise the LSG provided every school year to cater for the learning needs of the students of that school year and establish a regular mechanism to monitor the expenditure of the LSG, hence, schools in general should not have large surplus of the LSG. Schools can retain a maximum amount of unspent balance up to 30% of 12 months' provision of the grant in a school year and carry it forward to the next school year. Any surplus balance in excess of the capped amount should be returned to the EDB. The EDB will claw back the excess surplus according to the schools' audited annual accounts. Care should be taken to prevent the need for the clawback of LSG. Schools should flexibly utilise the grant to provide support for students with SEN. If a deficit is incurred, the grant can be topped up by other government funding, including surplus from DSS subsidy. If there remains a deficit after topping up, it should be made up by the schools' own fund/non-government fund.

Training

16. Professional development activities for teachers will be organised on a regular basis to enhance schools' capacity for identifying and supporting students with SEN and highlight the points that should be noted when using the LSG. Schools are invited to check out the Training Calendar on the EDB website and relevant correspondence.

Enquiry

17. For enquiries on the specific arrangement of the LSG, please contact the

Inspector of the respective Special Education Support Sections who is responsible for your school. For other enquiries, please contact the respective Senior School Development Officers.

Godwin LAI
for Permanent Secretary for Education

Use of LSG

The LSG must be used for supporting students with SEN and ALAs (applicable to primary schools). Schools should flexibly and strategically deploy the LSG, and also pool together various school resources (such as DSS subsidy, the Capacity Enhancement Grant and income from school fees) to support the students concerned. Schools may also tap resources available in the community to provide more comprehensive services. Specifically, schools can:

- employ additional teaching staff¹², on a full-time and/or part-time basis, to facilitate small group or individual remedial support;
- employ additional teaching assistants to assist teachers in designing learning activities and materials, supporting students in classroom learning activities, providing individual support on homework, training students with SEN on the use of assistive aids, helping students with writing problems to take notes, collecting data and records on student progress, liaising with parents, etc.;
- collaborate with other professionals through hiring of professional services (e.g. school-based remedial support programmes and behaviour guidance);
- procure learning resources (e.g. graded readers or audio-visual CD-ROMs/software for strengthening the reading and writing abilities of students with Special Learning Difficulties; yet procurement of computer devices, interactive electronic whiteboards, projectors, etc. is not allowed) to facilitate the learning of students with SEN;
- organise programmes on learning or inclusive culture so as to promote peer acceptance and support for students with SEN;
- conduct school-based teacher training programmes to enhance teachers' understanding of IE and support measures and to strengthen teachers' professionalism in catering for learner diversity; and
- strengthen home-school co-operation, for instance, through organising parent volunteer teams to provide paired-reading programmes for students.

Schools should refer to Chapter 9 – Use of Resources of the “*Operation Guide on Whole School Approach to Integrated Education*” to work out plans for the effective use of the LSG.

¹² The LSG cannot be used for employing school social workers.

Funding Procedures and Payment Schedule of the LSG for DSS Schools

