

29 March 2019

Education Bureau Circular No. 8/2019
Special Educational Needs Coordinator

[Note: This circular should be read by –

- (a) Supervisors and heads of all government, aided, caput and Direct Subsidy Scheme primary and secondary schools – for necessary action; and
- (b) Heads of special schools and heads of Sections – for information]

Summary

Starting from the 2017/18 school year, the Education Bureau (EDB) has provided, by phases in three years, each public sector ordinary primary and secondary school with an additional graduate teaching post to facilitate the school’s assignment of a designated teacher to take up the role of Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). In addition, starting from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB will upgrade the SENCO post to promotion rank in public sector primary and secondary schools with a comparatively large number of students with special educational needs (SEN)¹. This circular informs schools of the details of the said measures. It supersedes EDB Circular No. 9/2017 “Special Educational Needs Coordinator”.

Background

2. The EDB has all along been promoting integrated education (IE) in accordance with five basic principles, namely early identification, early intervention, Whole School Approach (WSA), home-school co-operation and cross-sector collaboration. Additional resources, professional support and teacher training are provided for public sector ordinary schools to cater for students with SEN. Schools are required to adopt the WSA, under which the student support team (SST) will assist the school principal and vice-principal(s) in implementing IE, align school policies, practices and culture, and deploy resources flexibly to cater for the needs of students with SEN under the 3-

¹ Implementation of the enhanced measures is subject to the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2019 by the Legislative Council.

tier Intervention Model².

3. As announced by the Chief Executive in July 2017, starting from the 2017/18 school year, the Government would, by phases in three years, provide each public sector ordinary primary and secondary school with an additional graduate teaching post at basic rank on the staff establishment to facilitate the school's assignment of a designated teacher to take up the role of SENCO to support IE.

Enhanced measures

4. According to the Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address, starting from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB will continue to implement a series of enhanced measures on IE to provide schools with a stable teaching force, additional resources that can be deployed flexibly and enhanced professional support to cater for students with SEN. These measures include restructuring various funding schemes on IE, extending the Learning Support Grant (LSG) and providing additional regular teaching posts, increasing the grant rate for tier-3 support in multifold, further extending the Enhanced School-based Educational Psychology Service and implementing the Enhanced School-based Speech Therapy Service. As for SENCOs, the EDB will upgrade the post of SENCO to promotion rank³ in schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN to enable SENCOs to perform their leadership duties more effectively.

Roles and qualifications of SENCO

5. SENCO is required to lead the SST⁴ and is tasked with assisting the school principal and vice-principal(s) in planning, coordinating and promoting the WSA to IE in order to foster a more inclusive school culture and enhance the effectiveness of the support given to students with SEN. School principals should support the SENCOs

² Tier-1 support refers to taking early care of all students with different learning and adjustment needs, including those with mild and transient learning and adjustment difficulties, through early identification and quality teaching in regular classroom; Tier-2 support refers to additional support/"add-on" intervention for students with persistent learning or adjustment difficulties, such as small group learning, after-school remedial programmes and pull-out programmes; Tier-3 support refers to individualised intensive support for students with persistent and severe learning or adjustment difficulties, including drawing up of Individual Education Plans.

³ It should be Senior Graduate Master/Mistress in secondary schools or Primary School Master/Mistress in primary schools. These teaching posts at promotion rank are additional teaching posts under specific improvement programmes.

⁴ SST is led by a SENCO to assist the principal and vice-principal(s) in implementing IE. Members should include a curriculum development leader/an academic team leader, the panel chairs of key subjects, a student guidance team leader, a school social worker, a school-based speech therapist and Special Educational Needs Support Teacher(s).

and enable them to lead the SSTs in planning and executing relevant work, encouraging active co-operation among all school staff and informing all stakeholders (including school staff, parents and students) of the school policies, measures and strategies in supporting students with SEN. Besides, the school management should give recognition and support to the work of SENCOs, create room for them to implement support measures, and empower them to deploy the additional resources and manpower under the IE policies.

6. The qualifications and professional training of SENCOs are the major factors facilitating the development of their role. Schools should give thorough consideration to teachers' length of teaching experience, work experience and relevant qualifications with a view to identifying a suitable teacher for the post of SENCO. Basically, teachers assuming the SENCO role should have at least three years' experience in teaching and in promoting IE respectively. They should have received training in special education, such as having completed the Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT) Courses on supporting students with SEN commissioned by the EDB and offered by tertiary institutions, or holding equivalent qualifications. Teachers taking up the post of SENCO but yet to fully complete the BAT Courses or attain equivalent qualifications are required to complete the professional training courses for SENCOs mentioned in paragraph 15 below and the remaining BAT courses within the first two school years of service. Besides, teachers who assume responsibilities of SENCO at promotion rank should meet the relevant requirements for the promotion rank.

Responsibilities of SENCO

7. Apart from promoting the WSA to IE, SENCO should also take up a certain amount of quality teaching duties to continuously enrich his/her experience in supporting students with SEN in class and putting various support measures into practice. Specifically, SENCO should lead the SST and work in close collaboration with the Special Educational Needs Support Teacher(s)⁵ in coordinating, promoting and developing the following SEN-related duties:

- according to the five basic principles on promotion of IE, strategically plan, implement, monitor, review and evaluate various internal measures for supporting students with SEN and resources deployment, thereby ensuring the appropriate use of LSG and the flexible deployment of the school's

⁵ The Special Educational Needs Support Teacher is an additional regular Graduate Master/Mistress post at basic rank that schools with the provision of LSG up to a specified threshold may exchange the grant for/are provided with.

manpower resources;

- promote early identification of and early intervention for students with SEN through a multi-disciplinary team approach;
- collaborate with various functional teams/teachers of different subject panels in the school to devise support programmes, curriculum and teaching adaptations, and special examination and assessment arrangements for students with SEN;
- through arrangements such as collaborative lesson planning, co-teaching and lesson study, encourage teachers to incorporate elements of support for students with SEN into curriculum design and learning and teaching, and guide fellow teachers in employing effective support strategies to enhance the learning effectiveness of students with SEN;
- collaborate with the guidance team in the school to cater for the learning needs of students with mental illness by giving input from the perspectives of teaching and learning as well as resource deployment, and strengthen mental health education;
- enhance home-school co-operation and work with parents to support students with SEN;
- review the special education training needs and profiles of teachers in the school, make systematic arrangements for teachers to receive relevant training, and plan and organise school-based professional development activities to enhance the capacity of the teaching team; and
- strengthen external liaison with professionals, community resources providers, parents, etc. to better coordinate the efforts and resources of various parties for supporting students with SEN in the school.

8. Schools should adjust the specific duties of SENCO according to the number of students with SEN and their support needs. In schools with a handful of students with SEN, the SENCO should strengthen preventive and developmental work such as strengthening the promotion of mental health and inclusive culture, and promoting the strategies of quality teaching to cater for learner diversity. As far as promotion of mental health is concerned, the SENCO should lead the SST in implementing mental health programmes and education activities together with the school's guidance team, in a bid to enhance the knowledge and awareness of mental health among students, teachers and parents, and help students maintain mental wellness with greater resilience.

9. Schools should allocate SENCO's work appropriately. For schools with a comparatively large number of students with SEN, the SENCO at promotion rank

should devote about 70% of his/her time⁶ to developing and performing duties set out in paragraph 7 but should not be asked to take up administration work irrelevant to the duties prescribed in paragraph 7. Schools with a handful of students with SEN may make adjustment to the work allocation for SENCOs at basic rank in light of school-based needs. That said, the time a SENCO devotes to the above-mentioned duties should not be less than 50% of his/her total. This is to avoid undermining the effectiveness of SENCO in leading, promoting and enhancing the development of IE in school. If schools plan to have their SENCO devote more than 70% of his/her total time to duties related to supporting students with SEN, the work distribution must be approved by the Incorporated Management Committee (IMC)/School Management Committee (SMC).

10. As SENCO spends most of his/her time performing duties set out in paragraph 7, he/she will take up less teaching work as compared with teachers of the same rank. Nevertheless, the teaching work performed by SENCO may include whole-class teaching or small group teaching, so that evidence-based teaching strategies⁷ applicable to students with SEN can be employed to cater for these students and learn about their learning needs and progress on an on-going basis. SENCO may gather experience in the process and share effective strategies with other teachers.

11. In broad terms, schools should exercise prudence when identifying a suitable teacher to take up the post of SENCO. The rank of the teacher identified should not be lower than the rank of the SENCO post created for the school. This is to ensure that the post-holder can perform his/her functions and duties effectively.

Implementation details

12. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the upgrading of SENCO post to promotion rank will depend on whether the LSG provision has reached the specified threshold (i.e. threshold 1)⁸. Schools can neither use the promotion rank for purposes other than the discharge of SENCO functions, nor permanently or temporarily freeze the post in order to obtain the Substitute Teacher Grant/Teacher Relief Grant. To ensure that schools can pass on their knowledge and experience in supporting students with SEN and maintain the stability of the teaching force, for schools with the SENCO post upgraded to promotion rank, a drop of LSG provision beyond the specified

⁶ About 70% of the total number of class periods of the students' timetable.

⁷ Examples include differentiated instruction, multi-sensory approach and scaffolding teaching.

⁸ Please refer to EDB Circular No. 6/2019 "Learning Support Grant" for details.

threshold in a particular school year will not immediately affect the rank of the post. In the event that the provision of LSG does not reach the specified threshold for three consecutive school years and there are indications that the situation will continue and the gap will be widened, the EDB will discuss with the school concerned for an appropriate arrangement premised upon school's situations.

13. For schools not entitled to a SENCO at promotion rank, they will continue to be provided with an additional teaching post (Graduate Mater/Mistress for secondary schools or Assistant Primary School Master/Mistress for primary schools) so that a designated teacher may be assigned to take up the role of SENCO. The additional teaching post will be included in the school's teaching staff establishment but will not be counted towards the calculation of promotion posts. Schools are not allowed to freeze this additional teaching post permanently or temporarily in order to obtain the Substitute Teacher Grant/Teacher Relief Grant.

14. For schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS), the additional teaching posts (including those at promotion rank) created under this initiative will be provided in the DSS unit subsidy rate, as with other measures for supporting students with SEN (e.g. the School-based Educational Psychology Service). DSS schools should assign a suitable teacher to serve as SENCO and carry out the duties specified in paragraphs 7 to 10 above. The teacher assigned is required to lead the SST or relevant functional groups and other teachers in adopting the WSA to provide appropriate need-based support for students with SEN. For details, please refer to the "Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education" on the EDB website.

Professional training for SENCOs

15. Apart from receiving relevant training in special education (see paragraph 6 above), new-to-role SENCOs have to participate in the professional training arranged for SENCOs by EDB. With a duration of approximately 120 hours, the training programme covers leadership, planning and management; support strategies based on student-centred approach; lesson study; provision mapping and management; continuing professional development for teachers; etc. It seeks to enhance the professional capacity of SENCOs in leading the school's SST in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the school's IE policies and support measures. For training details, please refer to the EDB's Training Calendar (<http://tcs.edb.gov.hk>). The EDB will also organise professional development activities for SENCOs, such as networking activities and sharing sessions.

Evaluation

16. Under the School Development and Accountability Framework, schools are required to self-evaluate their work effectiveness in supporting students with SEN annually. Schools have to submit a self-evaluation report⁹ on the WSA to IE via the Special Education Management Information System (SEMIS) at the end of each school year. To enhance transparency, schools are required to make the creation and the duties of the SENCO post known to different stakeholders (including teachers, parents and students), and set out the support services provided for students with SEN and the effectiveness of these services¹⁰ in their school reports, which are to be uploaded onto the school website upon approval of the SMC/IMC, for the information of stakeholders (including teachers, parents and students, etc.).

Enquiries

17. For enquiries about appointment (including promotion and acting up arrangements) and administrative matters, schools may contact the respective Senior School Development Officers. For enquiries about the duties of SENCOs and their professional training, schools may contact the Inspector of the respective Special Education Support Sections responsible for your school.

Godwin LAI
for Permanent Secretary for Education

⁹ It refers to the “Year-end Evaluation Form at School Level on Whole School Approach to Catering for Students with SEN”, which is attached to the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education”.

¹⁰ Please refer to the sample in the “Operation Guide on the Whole School Approach to Integrated Education”.