

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Government adopts a dual-track mode in providing special education. The Education Bureau (EDB) will, subject to the assessment and recommendations of specialists and the consent of parents, refer students with more severe or multiple disabilities to aided special schools for intensive support services. Meanwhile, EDB implements the Integrated Education (IE) Policy, other students with special educational needs will attend ordinary schools.

From the perspective of the education profession and with due consideration of the learning needs of students, EDB has been reviewing the development of special education and injecting resources to enhance the quality of education. Schools strive to help students overcome their limitations and difficulties, attain the learning level in accordance with their abilities, and realise their potential at different developmental stages so that they can gradually become independent persons with adaptability and the learning-to-learn capabilities to embrace the challenges in life.

Type and Number of Special Schools

In the 2023/24 school year (as of September 2023), there are 62 aided special schools in Hong Kong:

School Type	Total No. of Schools	No. of Schools with Boarding Section
School for Children with Intellectual Disability (ID) ¹	43	17
School for Children with Visual Impairment (VI)	2	2
School for Children with Hearing Impairment (HI)	1	1
School for Children with Physical Disability (PD)	7	4
School for Social Development (SSD)	8	(7) ²
Hospital School ³	1	-
Total :	62	24 / (7)²

1. *Schools for children with ID provide education services for children with mild ID, children with moderate ID and/or children with severe ID in accordance with the missions of respective schools. Schools for children with mild ID do not provide boarding service.*
2. *Residential home attached to the SSDs are subvented by the Social Welfare Department.*
3. *The Hospital School operates classes at 19 public hospitals, providing education services for hospitalised students. Students staying in hospital do not require boarding service.*

Duration of Study

In general, the admission age for special schools is six. Special schools have provided students with free primary and secondary education. While boarding fees are collected by boarding sections of special schools, students with financial difficulties may apply for fee remission.

Curriculum

The Committee on Special Educational Needs under the Curriculum Development Council is tasked to plan and coordinate special education curriculum development at all levels. It also considers and gives advice on curriculum continuity and curriculum integration to meet the special educational needs of students across all levels of school education and ability range. The curriculum devised for these students aims to achieve the goals of the Hong Kong school curriculum and align with the implementation of integrated education, so as to provide them with learning experiences comparable to those of their counterparts and develop their potential to the full. Respective curriculum development is undertaken by the Curriculum Support Division.

Special schools in general adopt the curriculum framework of the Hong Kong school curriculum and make reference to the Primary Education Curriculum Guide (Pilot Version) (2022) and Secondary Education Curriculum Guide (2017) in the development of the school-based curriculum that suits the abilities and addresses the specific needs of their students. Effective learning and teaching strategies are also employed to cater for the students' diverse learning needs.

Manpower and Resources

Class size of special schools is comparatively smaller than that of ordinary schools, ranging from 8 to 15 students per class, depending on the type of schools. At primary and junior secondary levels, the staffing ratio of special schools is 1.8 teachers per class. At senior secondary level, the staffing ratio for schools for children with ID is 2 teachers per class whereas that for schools offering the ordinary curriculum is 2.1 per class. To enhance the status and professional standard of teachers, the all-graduate teaching force policy has been fully implemented since the 2019/20 school year. To cater for the diverse needs of students, EDB has also provided respective types of special schools with additional teachers, such as resource teachers for children with autism spectrum disorders, as well as mobility instructors and teachers providing low-vision training to support students with VI.

In addition, various specialist staff are provided for different types of special schools to cater for the disabilities or learning difficulties of students. They include occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapy assistants, nurses, educational psychologists, social workers, braille staff, etc. As for the boarding sections, the specialist staff comprise wardens, assistant wardens, houseparents-in-charge, houseparents, programme workers, nurses, etc. Special schools will optimise the use of their manpower and resources to facilitate multi-disciplinary collaboration, with a view to catering for the different SEN of students.

With a view to enhancing the quality of education, the Government has introduced various improvement measures for public sector schools in recent years, in which aided

special schools also benefit from the measures. They include improving the teacher-to-class ratio, implementing the all-graduate teaching force policy, creating the post of school executive officer, providing a grant to strengthen information technology staffing, enhancing the manpower arrangements of vice-principals and deputy heads, improving the demarcation arrangements for headship rankings in secondary schools and manpower at the middle management level in primary schools. Besides, the Government also introduced a number of additional measures to enhance the support for aided special schools, which include improving the manpower for specialist staff, upgrading the ranks of warden and assistant warden of boarding sections, increasing the provision of staff and grants for boarding sections, upgrading the ranks of occupational therapist and physiotherapist, creating a nursing officer rank, giving flexibility to schools to appoint registered nurses with psychiatric training, providing schools for children with mild ID with school bus driver posts, improving the rank of school bus drivers in special schools, allowing schools with vacancies in the posts of teacher assistant, cook, school bus driver and watchman to opt for cash grants in order to recruit corresponding temporary auxiliary staff, increasing the resources and manpower provision for the hospital school to enhance their senior secondary education services, and providing a one-off Grant on New Technology in Classroom for special schools. These measures enable special schools to provide students with better education, which in turn enhance the quality of education in special schools.

Referral and Placement Mechanism

EDB has set up a referral and placement (R&P) mechanism to refer children with more severe or multiple disabilities to aided special schools. Under the R&P mechanism, the types of disabilities of the children and the types of special schools suitable for them are confirmed on account of the assessment results and recommendations of specialists. With reference to parents' school choices based on the specialists' recommendations, children are referred to the appropriate schools.

If ordinary schools want to arrange their students with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural difficulties to study in SSDs/Residential Homes (RHs), with consent from parents sought, they may refer the cases to the Central Co-ordinating Referral Mechanism (CCRM), which is jointly managed by EDB and the Social Welfare Department. Upon vetting and approval by the Vetting Committee under CCRM, the students concerned are referred to SSDs/RHs.

Training for Teachers

Since the 2007/08 school year, EDB has been providing structured training courses pitched at basic, advanced and thematic levels for serving teachers of ordinary and special schools on catering for students with special educational needs. Starting from the 2012/13 school year, EDB has also offered the Training Course for Special School Teachers to meet the professional needs of special school teachers in catering for students with more severe or multiple disabilities. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, EDB has launched the Leadership Development Programme for Middle Leaders of Special Schools to enhance middle management's professional leadership capacity.