CHAPTER 7

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
HONG KONG SPECIAL ADMINISTRATIVE REGION

GENERAL REVENUE ACCOUNT

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

Education Department

Services for students with special educational needs

Audit Commission
Hong Kong
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SERVICES FOR STUDENTS
WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Contents

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Summary and key findings

A.   **Introduction.**   Different types of special schools and special education services in mainstream schools have been established for children with special educational needs (SEN).   In 1998-99, 8,800 school places were provided in 62 special schools and 33,700 places in mainstream schools were provided with special education services.   The total expenditure on special education amounted to $1,685 million in 1998-99.   Furthermore, support services are also given to any student who has emotional problems (which may lead to student suicide in extreme cases) at some stage during his schooling.   Audit has conducted a review of the services for students with SEN and for preventing student suicide.   The audit findings are summarised in paragraphs B to G below.

B.   **Effectiveness of special education provided in special schools.**   Audit's questionnaire survey of the stakeholders (including principals, teachers, professional support staff and parents) indicates that the parents (as service users) generally do not perceive that the objectives of special education have been achieved.   The principals, however, perceive that the objectives have been achieved.   The parents are inclined to have higher expectations.   However, in the absence of key outcome performance indicators known to all stakeholders, assessment of the extent of effectiveness would tend to be based on their subjective judgement (paras. 2.2 to 2.6).

C.   The observable indicators for assessing the outcome of providing special education are post Secondary 3 (S3) placement and later employment of students who have received special education. For mentally handicapped S3 leavers, the placement figures ranged only from 30% to 68% for 1996-97 and 1997-98.   Furthermore, only a small number of them were able to obtain open employment.   In 1997-98, only 2.6% of mildly mentally handicapped students were able to obtain open employment (paras. 2.13 to 2.16).

D.   **Low enrolment in special schools.**   For the past six years from 1993-94 to 1998-99, compared with other special schools, the enrolment rates of schools for the visually impaired, schools for the hearing impaired, and the schools for social development (SSDs) had been relatively low. There has been an oversupply of places in these schools.   This is unsatisfactory because the school facilities are underutilised.   With increasing integration of students with SEN into mainstream schools, the demand for places in these special schools may drop (paras. 2.23 to 2.28).

E.   **Special education services in mainstream schools.**   Audit noted that teachers appointed to provide school-based remedial support were not always specially trained in special education or

remedial teaching methods. The effectiveness of Resource Classes and Peripatetic Teaching Service can be improved if mainstream teachers acquire skills that enable them to provide remedial teaching daily to those students in need. There are special classes in mainstream schools for students with impaired hearing and impaired vision. Because of the benefits of integration, it is more effective to integrate visually impaired students and hearing impaired students with SEN into mainstream classes (paras. 2.31 to 2.49).

F.   **Integration into mainstream schools.**   Integrating students with SEN into mainstream schools has been a long established policy since 1977.   However, a two-year pilot project on integration only took place in September 1997.   The interim report issued in July 1998 shows very positive evidence of support for integration.   Audit considers that students with emotional and behavioural problems are capable of undertaking mainstream studies and should be returned to mainstream schools as soon as they have adjusted their emotions and behaviour satisfactorily in SSDs (paras. 2.52 to 2.66).

G.   **Student suicide.**   In the past seven years, there was a total of 121 fatal cases and 302 attempted cases of student suicide.   The ED's analysis showed that poor family relationship/management and abnormal emotional reaction of students were the two major factors that had led to many cases of suicide.   Audit's survey indicates that many parents were not aware of these two major factors.   Many parents claimed that support services promoting parental care were not available in their children's schools and that they were not aware of support services provided by the Social Welfare Department and non-government organisations.   Many parents considered that the various support services provided were not effective in preventing student suicide.   A number of parents opined that the media should also play a positive role in promoting proper values and avoid sensational reporting of student suicide cases (paras. 3.1 to 3.33).

H.   **Audit recommendations.**   Audit has made the following main recommendations that the Director of Education should:

(a)   ascertain the reasons for the relatively low satisfaction of parents as service users, and take action to improve the special education services so as to address the concerns of service users (first and second insets of para. 2.7);

(b)   identify key outcome performance indicators so as to assess the extent of achievement of the objectives of special education, and evaluate its effectiveness (third and fourth insets of para. 2.7);

(c)   provide more support to special schools to enable them to implement effective work-skill preparation/work-experience programmes for mentally handicapped students (first inset of para. 2.17);

(d) take measures to address the problem of low enrolment in the schools for the visually impaired, schools for the hearing impaired and the SSDs (para. 2.28);

(e) consider requiring teachers employed in the School-based Remedial Support Programme to undergo relevant training (first inset of para. 2.42);

(f) help mainstream teachers acquire skills to better deal with students with SEN in mainstream schools (second inset of para. 2.42);

(g) as far as possible, refer students with impaired vision and impaired hearing to mainstream classes instead of to special classes (first inset of para. 2.50);

(h) take positive action to expedite the implementation of integration (para. 2.61);

(i) for students who show marked improvement in SSDs, take action to facilitate returning them to mainstream schools as soon as possible (first inset of para. 2.67);

(j) in addressing the problem of student suicide, make more parents aware of the importance of good family relationship and parental support for their children (first inset of para. 3.17);

(k) encourage schools to enhance the support services for strengthening the parent-child and home-school relationship so as to prevent student suicide (first inset of para. 3.23); and

(l) reflect the parents' concerns about student suicide to the media, and regularly apprise the media of the possible negative effects of sensational reporting of student suicide (para. 3.33).

I.   **Response from the Administration.** The Administration has generally accepted the audit recommendations.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

1.1   According to Education Commission Report No. 4 (ECR4) issued in 1990, the education system has to cater for students with a wide range of abilities, interests and needs. Most students may be grouped by age and taught in regular classes following a common curriculum. However, there are students for whom the education provided by the common curriculum is not wholly suitable. These students, who are commonly called students with special educational needs (SEN), need special educational provision to help them overcome any learning or behavioural problems they may have.

1.2   In Hong Kong, students with SEN are generally defined as those who have one or more of the following characteristics:

    (a)   physically handicapped;

    (b)   hearing impaired;

    (c)   visually impaired;

    (d)   mentally handicapped;

    (e)   with behavioural and emotional problems;

    (f)   academically unmotivated;

    (g)   with severe learning difficulties;

    (h)   academically less abled; and

    (i)   academically gifted.

Although students with SEN include those who are academically gifted, in practice, special educational provision in Hong Kong has focused mainly on students with disabilities, impairment or learning problems.

1.3   The implementation in 1978 of compulsory education for all children aged between six and 15 years brought into focus the need to provide special education and support for some students. Ordinary schools claimed that they lacked the knowledge, skills and resources necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities and learning difficulties. As a result, throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, there had been a fairly rapid growth in the development and provision of special education facilities and services. Currently, different types of special schools and services are established to meet the needs of children with SEN.

1.4   At the same time as segregated special education facilities were being developed, there was also a stated intention on the part of the Education Department (ED) to adopt a policy of integration. It was believed that whenever possible children with SEN should begin to attend regular schools, rather than being enrolled in special schools. The process of integration followed similar developments in many other countries. The gradual move towards integration since the 1970s has broadened the scope of special education in Hong Kong, with a part of the services now being directed towards supporting children in regular schools.

1.5   For the 1998-99 school year, about 8,800 school places were provided in 62 special schools in the territory (see Appendix A). Concurrently, there were 33,700 additional places within the mainstream schools providing some form of special education or service. In total, nearly 43,000 places were provided for children with SEN. This represented 4.6% (Note 1) of the total school population. The total expenditure on special education for 1997-98 and 1998-99 was considerable, as follows:

Year	Recurrent and non-recurrent expenditure in special schools	Support in mainstream schools	ED's expenditure on special education	Total
	($ million)	($ million)	($ million)	($ million)
1997-98	1,037	251	187	**1,475**
1998-99	1,198	282	205	**1,685**

Note 1:   *In the 1998-99 school year, there were 477,000 primary school students and 456,000 secondary school students, making a total of 933,000 students. The students with SEN were about 4.6% (i.e. 43,000/933,000 × 100%).*

1.6   ECR4 states that, apart from the special educational provision given to students with SEN, "special educational provision in the form of support services is available to any student who has emotional problems at some stage during his schooling. These support services include counselling and guidance to help students overcome their emotional problems".

1.7   The ED acknowledges that emotional problems, in varying degrees, can prevent students from enjoying social and educational experiences of home and school. Students with emotional problems may find it difficult to adjust to the situations of the day. In extreme cases, these students may develop excessively nervous, aggressive, withdrawn or delinquent behaviour. Extreme emotional reactions to certain situations could result in such students using self-destructive means to try to demonstrate their grievances (e.g. committing suicide as a means to "cope" with problems). Counselling and guidance to these students is particularly important for preventing suicide.

AUDIT REVIEW

1.8   Recently, Audit has conducted a review of the ED's role in:

—   managing the special educational needs of students (PART 2); and

—   preventing student suicide (PART 3).

The objective is to ascertain whether there is room for improvement in the provision of services for students with SEN and for preventing student suicide.

1.9   This report will not cover the areas included in the review contained in Chapter 8 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 32 of March 1999, in which Audit reported the review results of the practical schools and skills opportunity schools. (These special schools were established upon the recommendations of ECR4 in 1990 to cater for unmotivated students and students with severe learning difficulties.)

PART 2: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS

**EFFECTIVENESS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
PROVIDED IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS**

2.1   This PART assesses the various services provided in special schools, and the special education services in mainstream schools for students with SEN.

2.2   Audit has assessed the extent to which the objectives of special education provided in special schools have been achieved by examining:

—   the stakeholders' perception of the achievement of the objectives; and

—   the outcome of providing special education services.

Objectives of special education

2.3   The ED has stated that the objectives of special education are to enable the students:

—   to realise their potential;

—   to achieve certain independence; and

—   to become well-adjusted members in the community.

Stakeholders' perception of effectiveness

2.4   Audit commissioned a consultant to conduct a questionnaire survey of the stakeholders (including principals, teachers, professional support staff and parents) of the special education services in special schools. The survey aimed at finding out the stakeholders' perception of effectiveness of the special education services, using the objectives stated in paragraph 2.3 above as indicators for achieving the desired results.

2.5   The questionnaire survey covered a total of 36 principals of special schools (or 58% of the 62 principals of special schools). Two follow-up discussion meetings were held with the principals. In addition, 496 teachers, 206 professional support staff and 2,444 parents of special schools responded to the survey. The results of the survey are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

**Comparison of different degrees of
perceived effectiveness of the three objectives of special education**

First objective: realisation of students' potential

Perceived degree of effectiveness	Principals	Teachers and professional support staff	Parents
	(%)	(%)	(%)
Low to quite low	3	13	38
Moderate	35	51	40
Quite high to high	62	36	22
	100	100	100

Second objective: students have reached certain independence

Perceived degree of effectiveness	Principals	Teachers and professional support staff	Parents
	(%)	(%)	(%)
Low to quite low	23	29	43
Moderate	24	49	35
Quite high to high	53	22	22
	100	100	100

Third objective: students have become well-adjusted members in the community

Perceived degree of effectiveness	Principals	Teachers and professional support staff	Parents
	(%)	(%)	(%)
Low to quite low	26	38	57
Moderate	41	46	28
Quite high to high	33	16	15
	100	100	100

Source: Audit's survey

Audit observations on survey results

2.6   The survey indicates that the parents (as service users) generally do not perceive that the three objectives of special education have been achieved. The school principals, however, generally perceive that the three objectives have been achieved. **The parents are inclined to have higher expectations than the principals and the teachers in their children realising their potential, gaining independence and becoming well-adjusted members in the community. However, in the absence of key outcome performance indicators known to all stakeholders, assessment of the extent of effectiveness would tend to be based on their subjective judgement.**

Audit recommendations on survey results

2.7   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should:**

—   **ascertain the reasons for the relatively low satisfaction of parents as service users;**

—   **taking into account the audit recommendations of this Report, take action to improve the special education services so as to address the concerns of service users;**

—   **identify key outcome performance indicators (e.g. whether the students would pursue vocational training, continue further education, or show improvement in their capability to assist in domestic affairs or family business) so as to assess the extent of achievement of the objectives of special education; and**

—   **evaluate the effectiveness of the various types of special education by reference to the key performance indicators.**

Response from the Administration

2.8   The **Secretary for Education and Manpower** has said that he agrees that there is a need to establish outcome performance indicators.

2.9   The **Director of Education** has said that:

—   the ED will follow up with Audit's recommendation to help schools better understand parents' expectations. Where possible, schools surveyed could be requested to discuss the matter with parents and come up with agreed arrangements for future development; and

—   as regards performance indicators, the ED is working on them in consultation with special schools to include value-added elements with emphasis on procedures and progress rather than just on outcomes.

Views of school principals on improvements of special education

2.10 As part of their response to the survey questionnaire, in early 1999 many principals forwarded their views to Audit on how special education could be improved. They believed that the problems encountered in special schools had become more complex. Audit transmitted their views to the ED. Their views are summarised as follows:

— *Administration by the ED.* The principals informed Audit that the ED should:

(i) be flexible in providing support to the special schools and quick in approving application grants;

(ii) give school flexibility to handle financial matters;

(iii) reduce class size and provide opportunity for students to continue their education after Secondary 3 (S3);

(iv) update the facilities and equipment and increase subsidy and facility to schools;

(v) train more ED staff and teachers in mainstream schools in special education; and

(vi) involve special educators in formulating policy in special education;

— *Human resources.* The principals believed that there was a need to increase:

(i) teaching and administrative staff, i.e. teachers, assistant teachers, teaching support for information technology, curriculum designers and clerical support; and

(ii) professional support staff, i.e. music therapists, speech therapists, physical and occupational therapists and psychologists; and

— *Others.* The principals considered that:

(i) the Curriculum Development Institute (Note 2) should expand support to special schools; and

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Note 2: *The Curriculum Development Institute is part of the ED, and is mainly responsible for planning and development of school curricula.*

(ii)   tertiary institutions had only limited in-service training for special education teachers.

Audit recommendations on views of principals

2.11   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should study carefully the views of the principals, particularly in the following areas:**

—   **greater flexibility in providing support to special schools;**

—   **more special education training for ED officers and teachers in mainstream schools;**

—   **more involvement of special educators in policy deliberations; and**

—   **expansion of support of the Curriculum Development Institute to special schools.**

Response from the Administration

2.12   The **Director of Education** has said that:

—   in line with the spirit of school-based management, schools will enjoy greater flexibility in resource management and curriculum planning;

—   to deliver quality service to schools, ED officers will advance and update their professional expertise in special education through departmental training programmes, duty visits and planned staff development activities. As regards ordinary school teachers, they now have more access to special education knowledge through either their initial teacher education or refresher training.   In-service introductory seminars, remedial teaching workshops conducted on an annual basis plus the issue of the teachers' guide on meeting children's SEN also help strengthen teachers' professional development;

—   special education personnel are represented on various advisory committees such as Education Commission subgroup on special education, Board of Education and its subcommittee on special education, etc. The ED will involve more special education experts in policy deliberation as and when necessary; and

— the Curriculum Development Institute is working in close partnership with special schools to map out core curriculum areas and teaching strategies to enhance learning.

Outcomes of providing special education services

2.13   The outcomes of providing special education services are difficult to measure objectively. A practical approach is to identify observable indicators that might suggest that progress is being made in the desired direction. **It is commonly accepted that two of the available observable indicators for special education are post-S3 placement and later employment of students who have received special education.**

Post-S3 placement of mentally handicapped students

2.14   Audit noted with concern that the placement figures for S3 leavers with mild, moderate or severe mental handicap ranged only from 30% to 68% for 1996-97 and 1997-98 (Appendix B). The vast majority of them had to be assisted under the Government's rehabilitation programme (i.e. residential care, day activity centres, sheltered workshops or skills centres). In 1997-98, only 6 out of 231 mildly mentally handicapped students (or 2.6%) were able to obtain open employment.

2.15   Audit recognises that the employment opportunities of students with mental handicap are limited. It is most difficult to place those S3 leavers who have moderate to severe intellectual retardation and some form of additional handicaps. Moderately and severely mentally handicapped students are difficult to obtain open employment.

Audit observations on placement
opportunities for mentally handicapped students

2.16   Recent research suggests that the employment potential of mildly handicapped school leavers could be improved with appropriate training to the staff and the provision of well-designed school-to-work transition programmes. These can involve some appropriate work-experience placement under the supervision of school staff. The efficacy of the special school curriculum can be improved to prepare mildly mentally handicapped students for entry into open (as well as sheltered) employment.

Audit recommendations on placement
opportunities for mentally handicapped students

2.17   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should:**

— **provide more support to special schools to enable them to implement effective work-skill preparation/work-experience programmes for mentally handicapped students who might stand to benefit from them. Such support may take the form of published curriculum guidelines on such topics as supervised work experience and work skills acquisition;**

— **provide training and development programmes for special school staff working in the curriculum area of work skills; and**

— **in consultation with the Secretary for Health and Welfare, consider improving the placement opportunities of mentally handicapped students, especially the moderately and severely handicapped students, by expanding the rehabilitation programme.**

Response from the Administration

2.18   The **Secretary for Education and Manpower** has said that for the mildly mentally handicapped, they are normally placed, upon graduation from school, in Skills Centres which will help broaden their prospects for open employment.   Other rehabilitation programmes including sheltered workshops, day activity centres and residential care are available to the moderately and severely mentally handicapped after they have completed their school education.   However, it should be borne in mind that placement in these rehabilitation programmes is entirely voluntary. Parents can choose to keep their mentally handicapped children at home.   The objectives of special education cannot be equated with 100% placement, nor placement should be equated with open employment.

2.19   The **Director of Education** has said that:

— many special schools for the mentally handicapped have already developed their school-based pre-vocational programmes using donated funds.   They can be pooled together to form a data bank to benefit all school leavers.   With the input of the school social workers, teachers work in collaboration to develop students' social and work skills to the expectation of the community in transition to post-S3 placement;

— the ED will consider helping schools to set up an effective network to develop and disseminate good practices in supporting special school staff for better result.   Such a service area will form a focus of study in the future teacher retraining programmes for senior teachers; and

— the ED will continue to reflect students' needs to the Health and Welfare Bureau and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) through the current liaison machinery.   This includes the periodic Rehabilitation Programme Plan Review and the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee — Education and Personnel Subcommittee.   Prime concerns may lie in improving the survey data and better matching between the provision and needs.

2.20   The **Secretary for Health and Welfare** has said that:

— open employment is a realistic goal for mildly mentally handicapped students and that the special school curriculum should facilitate their development in that direction.   It would be appropriate and desirable for special schools to cultivate good attitude and habit towards work in teaching and prepare students for proper skills training programme in

skills centres. With the opening of two new skills centres in 1997 and 1998, there is no shortage of training places for special school graduates;

— in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of subvented hostels, day activity centres and sheltered workshop places for the moderately and severely mentally handicapped. However, there are still long waiting lists for such services and the majority of applicants for residential facilities would have to wait for four to five years. For cases in need of special consideration, there is a mechanism for priority placement. Resources have also been earmarked to provide about 3,400 additional day service and residential places in coming years; and

— as a longer-term measure, there is a need to strengthen family's and community's support to facilitate people with disabilities to live in the community instead of subvented institutions. The latter has found to be a costly commitment for society.

LOW ENROLMENT IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Enrolment situation in special schools

2.21   Audit has examined the enrolment situation in special schools. In the 1998-99 school year, there were 62 special schools (excluding four practical schools and seven skills opportunity schools) in the territory (see Appendix A).

2.22   Special schools receive subvention from the ED under the Code of Aid for Special Schools. The ED also provides subsidy for employing paramedical, social work, nursing and residential care staff in these schools. Audit analysed the enrolment situation of these special schools for the past six school years from 1993-94 to 1998-99. **Audit observed that the enrolment of schools for the visually impaired, for the hearing impaired and for social development had been relatively low in those six years, as shown in Appendix C.**

Low enrolment in schools for the visually impaired

2.23   At present, there is one special school (School A) for the visually impaired and there is another special school (Training Centre B) for visually impaired children with mental handicap. Both schools are located at the same site. School A has an approved capacity of 165 places and follows the ordinary curriculum. This school maintains a full stream of classes. For Training Centre B, there are only six classes to cater for 60 students aged 6 to 16. The enrolment rate of these two schools had been low for the past six school years from 1993-94 to 1998-99, ranging from 67.1% to 70.5%. A further analysis shows that throughout the same period, the enrolment rate of Training Centre B exceeded 80%, while the enrolment rate of School A was about 62%.

2.24   Although the enrolment rate of School A is low (there were 61 unfilled places as at mid February 1999), currently there is little scope for class reduction as there is only one class for each grade.

Low enrolment in schools for the hearing impaired

2.25   There are four schools for the hearing impaired. Two schools are located on Hong Kong Island; one provides primary education and the other secondary education. The other two schools are located in Kowloon and in the New Territories, which provide both primary and secondary education.

2.26   Although the total capacity of these four schools had gradually been reduced from 740 to 640 during the four years from 1995-96 to 1998-99, the enrolment rate has not improved much. As a result of the decline in demand for places in these schools, the enrolment rate had been low in the past six years (ranging from 75.3% to 83.1%). In 1998-99, there were 129 (640 less 511) unfilled places, which indicated that the facilities provided were underutilised.

Low enrolment in schools for social development

2.27   There are seven schools for social development (SSDs) which are intended for students with emotional and behavioural problems. In the six years from 1993-94 to 1998-99, the enrolment rate ranged from 65.7% to 85.1%. These schools have many unfilled places. While the supply of places increased by 5% (from 900 to 945) during the six-year period 1993-94 to 1998-99, the demand dropped by 2% (from 766 to 750). The number of unfilled places increased from 134 in 1993-94 by 61 to 195 in 1998-99. These places are more than the average capacity of 135 places (Note 3) of one SSD. Although the number of SSDs was reduced from eight to seven in 1992-93, no action has since been taken to further reduce the supply of places. Audit observes that there is potential for increasing the integration of students in the SSDs into the mainstream schools (see paragraphs 2.63 to 2.66 below). As a result, the number of unfilled places may increase further in future.

Audit observations and recommendations

2.28   **There has been an oversupply of places in the schools for the visually impaired, schools for the hearing impaired and SSDs. This is unsatisfactory because the school facilities are underutilised. With increasing integration of students with SEN into mainstream schools, the demand for places in these special schools may drop. Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should take measures to address the problem of low enrolment in these schools. In particular, the Director should:**

    —   **conduct an assessment of the long-term demand for places in these schools so as to match supply and demand; and**

    —   **consider reducing the number of classes of the same grade in those schools which have many unfilled places.**

Note 3:   *There are seven SSDs, with a total capacity of 945 places. The capacity of these school ranges from 75 to 270 places. The average capacity is 135 (i.e. 945/7) places.*

Response from the Administration

2.29   The **Secretary for Education and Manpower** has said that he is aware that supply of school places in certain categories of special schools exceeds demand, and will always keep overall demand and supply under review to ensure that resources are put to best use whilst meeting the needs of students.

2.30   The **Director of Education** has said that:

— the ED is monitoring the demand with a view to ascertaining its long-term trend so as to dovetail the supply with the demand;

— every year, the ED regulates the class organisation of all special schools based on the referral and placement situation and the anticipated demand of places. Redundant classes will be cut in the ensuing school year if low enrolment is expected;

— given the fact that these schools have to maintain a full class structure in order to offer the ordinary school curriculum, the percentage of enrolment is not considered low, particularly for the 1998-99 school year which was about 70% for schools for the visually impaired, and 80% for schools for the hearing impaired and the SSDs; and

— with the introduction of the Central Coordinating Referral Mechanism and the provision of short-term adjustment programmes in the SSDs, the enrolment situation in these schools has been increasing, as shown below.

Year (as at April)	Demand	Supply
1997	648	945
1998	701	945
1999	783	945
2000	884*	945
2001	965*	945

* Projected demand

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

2.31   Audit also reviewed the provision of special education services in mainstream schools. Special education services are provided in ordinary schools as well as in the various types of special schools.   Currently, about 33,700 students attending ordinary schools are provided with support services in various modes (see Table 2 below).

Table 2

Support services in mainstream schools
(excluding the 2-year Pilot Project on Integration)

Students with SEN due to	Support services provided		Number of places provided in 1998-99
Learning difficulties	School-based Remedial Support Programme (SRSP)		21,090
	Resource Classes (RC)		9,720
	Peripatetic Teaching Service (PTS)		64
	Resource teaching centres		1,175
	Adjustment units		432
		Sub-total	32,481
Hearing impairment	Special classes		90
	Peripatetic advisory services		640
	Supportive Remedial Services		180
		Sub-total	910
Visual impairment	Special classes		120
	Resource teachers for blind integrators		36
		Sub-total	156
Physical handicaps	Resource Help Service		166
Total			**33,713**

Source: ED's records

School-based Remedial Support Programme
for students with learning difficulties

2.32   The School-based Remedial Support Programme (SRSP) provides support for the bottom 10%, in terms of academic achievements, of junior secondary students. Additional teachers are provided for the 108 schools with these programmes in operation. ED inspectors also provide advice. Additional teachers are provided on the basis of the actual number of bottom 10% students enrolled in the school. Each school receives one additional teacher for every 75 S1 students. In S2 and S3, the ratio is one teacher to every 100 students. The additional teachers provide any or all of the following services, usually through small group instruction:

—   intensive remedial teaching;

—   study skills instruction; and

—   learning support.

The main focus for remedial teaching is the three basic subjects of Chinese, English and mathematics.

2.33   In January 1999, 21,090 students received help through the SRSP. Audit noted that the additional teachers appointed to provide school-based remedial support were not always specially trained in special education or remedial teaching methods. However, a four-week block release course for such training is available at the Hong Kong Institute of Education.

Audit observations on SRSP

2.34   **Audit considers that teachers supporting students who are academically weak should have additional training in remedial teaching, strategies for curriculum adaptation and modifying instructional materials. Ideally they should also have "staff development skills" to enable them to help other teachers so that, as a teacher group, they can cater more effectively for the needs of academically weaker students. This will have long-term benefits for schools and students.**

Resource Classes and Peripatetic Teaching Service
for students with learning difficulties

2.35   *Resource Classes (RC).* These classes in primary schools cater for children with learning difficulties and provide intensive remedial support. The students attending RC are actually studying in mainstream classes but are put into the RC for specific teaching during certain lessons. Specialist teachers provide tuition in Chinese, English and mathematics for groups of up to 15 students. In 1998-99, a total of 9,720 places were provided in 648 RC (580 in aided primary schools and 68 in government primary schools). The actual enrolment was about 8,700 students.

2.36   In general, students whose educational attainment is behind by two years or more in at least two of the basic subjects of Chinese, English and mathematics are recommended for intensive remedial support in RC. RC teachers, together with ordinary class teachers, review regularly the students' progress and their duration of study in the class. When the students show steady progress in one subject, partial mainstreaming can be arranged on a subject-by-subject basis. Students' progress in the basic subjects is reviewed each year. Those who have shown sufficient progress and can cope with the ordinary curriculum in any of the basic subjects are allowed to rejoin their own classes for lessons in those subjects.

2.37   *Peripatetic Teaching Service (PTS).* PTS is a relatively small-scale service that provides some special education support to Primary 1 (P1) to Primary 6 (P6) students in schools in which there is no RC. A visiting teacher teaches children with learning difficulties in these schools in groups of six to ten students. The focus of instruction is Chinese, English and mathematics. In the school year 1998-99, the capacity for PTS was 64 places, but the actual enrolment was 71.

2.38   Schools receiving PTS do not operate RC because either of accommodation problems, or the number of students requiring intensive remedial support fluctuates. The visiting teachers deliver teaching in Chinese, English and mathematics twice weekly at these schools. The teaching sessions, each lasting for two hours, are conducted at the school premises outside the normal school hours (i.e. students who attend morning school attend PTS in the afternoon, and students who attend school in the afternoon attend PTS in the morning). At the end of each school term, PTS teachers liaise with the schools concerned to review students' progress as well as the need for the provision of PTS in the next school year.

Audit observations on RC and PTS

2.39   **In 1996, the Report of the Subcommittee on Special Education of the Board of Education remarked that the special education teachers teaching in RC were rather isolated in schools. In Audit's view, there is little opportunity for them to influence the work of the ordinary class teachers, or vice versa. This creates a self-perpetuating situation in which the mainstream teachers are quite prepared to continue to handover children with learning difficulties to the special education teachers, rather than acquiring the necessary skills to deal with the problems themselves.**

2.40   The fact that students are provided with PTS only **twice** a week is a cause for concern. Research indicates that students with learning problems need **daily** attention. Providing PTS twice a week is inadequate, unless the mainstream class teacher gives additional help. The peripatetic teacher needs to have close liaison with the mainstream teacher to ensure continuity of progress in the programme.

2.41   **The effectiveness of RC and PTS can be improved if mainstream teachers acquire skills that enable them to provide remedial teaching daily to those students in need.** The development of skills by mainstream teachers will benefit students with SEN. In countries such as USA, Canada, U.K. and Australia, this teacher development role is carried out by "special education support teachers". Presently, there are no such teachers in Hong Kong who assume this role.

Audit recommendations on SRSP, RC and PTS

2.42   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should:**

     —   **consider requiring teachers employed in SRSP to undergo relevant training available at the Hong Kong Institute of Education; and**

     —   **help mainstream teachers acquire skills to better deal with students with SEN in mainstream schools by:**

          (i)   **using existing special education teachers to carry out the additional task of teacher development of mainstream teachers; and**

          (ii)   **encouraging RC teachers and peripatetic remedial teachers to support mainstream teachers.**

Response from the Administration

2.43   The **Director of Education** has said that the ED's prime concern is that all teachers should possess initial teacher training upon their appointment. They always encourage teachers to advance their expertise through various in-service teacher training programmes, most of which are job-related. The Director has also said that:

     —   at present, most teachers in the SRSP have received the relevant training at the Hong Kong Institute of Education. The course will be revised to cater for broader interests of teachers;

     —   in the course of development of integrated education, teachers with special education training and the peripatetic teachers are expected to play a more important role in supporting a whole school approach to meeting children's SEN; and

     —   with more special education elements being built into the initial teacher education, the ED can expect more positive response and cooperation from the ordinary class teachers.

**Special classes in mainstream schools for students
with impaired hearing and impaired vision**

2.44   *Students with impaired hearing.* Nine remedial support classes, with a maximum class size of ten students, are provided for children with impaired hearing in primary and secondary schools. According to the ED's records, in 1998-99, 50 students with impaired hearing (14 primary and 36 secondary) were receiving their education in special classes.

2.45   In addition, 680 students are supported in regular classes. Services to students with impaired hearing in mainstream classes include Peripatetic Advisory Service (PAS) and Supportive Remedial Service (SRS). PAS is delivered by means of school visits. The service targets all students with impaired hearing who are studying in the mainstream schools. The aim of PAS is to facilitate good adjustment of these students. Services include speech training, auditory training, educational guidance, and technical support for equipment. SRS provides intensive remedial teaching support for students in regular classes (P1 to S3) who have moderate to profound hearing loss. The assistance is provided if they have failed in two or more of the three basic subjects of Chinese, English and mathematics. SRS is subvented by the ED and is organised through the schools for the hearing impaired. Trained teachers of the deaf, who may also provide the students with speech and communication training, carry out the remedial teaching.

2.46   In 1997-98, one student was referred for placement in special class. Referrals of hearing impaired children to special classes are based on the recommendations of an audiologist of the ED. Audiologists make placement recommendations according to the students' educational needs.

2.47   *Students with impaired vision.* Eight classes are provided for children with partial sight, with a maximum of 15 students in a class. Up to 120 students with impaired vision can be accommodated in these eight classes. Currently, 42 students with partial sight study in special classes (29 primary and 13 secondary). Seventy-two children with impaired vision are currently integrated into mainstream schools. Support services available to visually impaired children include: resource teacher, referral and placement assessments, psychological services and access to advisory services on demand.

2.48   In 1997-98, eight students were referred for placement in special classes. Referrals of visually impaired children to special classes for visually impaired children are based on the recommendations of an ophthalmologist or an optometrist.

Audit observations and recommendations on special classes

2.49   **Audit observes that the ED's long-term goal is to integrate students into mainstream schools and that there is strong evidence of support for integration (see paragraphs 2.53 to 2.59 below). On this basis, it is more effective to integrate visually impaired students and hearing impaired students into mainstream classes.**

2.50   **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should:**

—   **as far as possible, refer students with impaired vision and impaired hearing to mainstream classes instead of to special classes; and**

—   **strengthen the ED's support to mainstream classes (e.g. by providing additional teachers and equipment) so as to facilitate their taking in more students with impaired vision and impaired hearing.**

Response from the Administration

2.51   The **Director of Education** has said that:

— based on children's educational needs and assessment of the benefits they are likely to derive, the ED will continue to refer as many students with SEN as possible to mainstream classes; and

— the ED will also continue to strengthen the support to mainstream classes, using their available resources.

INTEGRATION INTO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

2.52   Audit has examined the progress and opportunities of integrating students with SEN into mainstream schools.

Integration policy

2.53   As early as 1977, the White Paper on Integrating the Disabled into the Community advocated that:

"disabled children will be encouraged to receive education in ordinary schools".

2.54   In 1995, the White Paper on Rehabilitation re-emphasised that:

"the main trend of special education has been one of helping children with a disability to integrate into the mainstream as far as possible so that they can receive an appropriate education alongside their peers".

2.55   According to the Information Sheet issued by the ED, it remains the goal for special education to place children with SEN *"whenever possible in ordinary schools so that they receive the fullest benefit of education from mixing and interacting with ordinary children in an ordinary environment".* There has evidently been an awareness of the need to move towards educational integration for over two decades.

Audit observations on integration

2.56   The 1996 Report of the Subcommittee on Special Education of the Board of Education commented that integration of students with SEN into the mainstream of schooling remains *"an aspiration rather than a reality".* The Board of Education has recommended that a pilot project be used to facilitate a more effective policy implementation.

2.57   In September 1997, the ED launched a two-year pilot project on the integration of students with disabilities into ordinary schools. This programme involved 46 students in seven primary and two secondary schools, distributed across all years of schooling. They included students with:

—   mild mental handicap;

—   visual impairment;

—   hearing impairment;

—   physical handicap; and

—   autistic disorder (normal IQ range).

2.58   The ED intended to use the pilot project to evaluate the effectiveness of integration of students with disabilities into ordinary schools, and to help design long-term strategies.

2.59   **In July 1998, the Integration Evaluation Research Team commissioned by the ED issued an interim report.   According to the report, the results of the first survey into integration in Hong Kong** *showed very positive evidence of support for integration.* **Parents of integrators showed strong support.** They claimed greater satisfaction with the academic progress of their children than parents of non-integrators, even though both groups of children appeared to have the same level of school work, tests and examinations. Parents of non-integrators also strongly supported integration.

2.60   This ED's pilot project on integration only took place in September 1997, which was 20 years after integration was first recommended in the 1977 White Paper.

Audit recommendations on integration

2.61   In view of the ED's long established policy on integrating students with SEN into mainstream schools and the parental support for this policy, **Audit has** *recommended* **that the Director of Education should take positive action to expedite the implementation of integration. In particular, the Director should:**

—   **identify as many students as possible for integration into mainstream schools; and**

—   **draw up an action plan for integrating students with SEN into mainstream schools.**

Response from the Administration

2.62   The **Director of Education** has said that since 1977, various forms of special education provision have been provided in the ordinary school setting to support integration of SEN children. These include resource classes, special classes for the hearing impaired and the visually impaired, remedial teaching service and peripatetic teaching service, etc. These provisions have come a long way towards meeting parents' and students' needs. The 1997 pilot project on integration is the first of its kind to explore the feasibility of accommodating children with different disabilities through a whole school approach. This will provide the experience and knowledge base for future development of an inclusive education system. It is anticipated that more schools will participate in the scheme in the coming school year. The Director has also said that:

—   it has been the policy of the ED to integrate as many students with SEN as possible into ordinary schools. It is implemented through a spectrum of Intensive Remedial Support Services which are either school-based, centre-based or peripatetic in delivery; and

—   the ED will continue to implement this policy. In fact, upon the completion of the pilot project on integrating students with SEN into ordinary schools which promoted a whole school approach to integration in nine participating schools in 1997-98 and 1998-99, the ED will extend the integration scheme to 21 schools in 1999-2000. The ED plans to further extend the integration programme to 40 schools in 2000-2001.

Integration of students in SSDs

2.63   In 1997-98, 88 out of 119 S3 students in the SSDs (students with emotional and behavioural problems) were integrated to S4 in mainstream schools, representing 74% of S3 students in the SSDs. In addition, 69 out of 80 (or 86%) P6 students were integrated into mainstream schools. Besides the normal exit points at P6 and S3, eight S1 and six S2 students who had been found fit for integration were also mainstreamed to S2 and S3 respectively in the same school year.

2.64   If the students of the SSDs improve sufficiently before reaching S3, they may either be allocated to S1 of ordinary schools through Secondary School Places Allocation after completing P6, or be referred through the ED for ordinary school placement at other levels. After completing S3, suitable students of the SSDs will be allocated to S4 in ordinary schools through the Junior Secondary Education Assessment. The SSDs usually follow up their school leavers in mainstream schools for two years through regular contacts with the students and the ordinary schools, periodic gatherings and experience-sharing sessions.

Audit observations on integration of
students with emotional and behavioural problems

2.65   It is noted that after S3, 74% of students from the SSDs pursued further studies in ordinary schools. **This suggests that as the students appear to be capable of undertaking mainstream studies, behavioural improvement support could be offered in the ordinary school situation rather than in a special setting.** Recent research suggests that students with emotional

and behavioural problems could be addressed within the context of the student's own mainstream school. The trend in advanced countries has been towards inclusion of all students with special needs in the mainstream, including those with emotional and behavioural disturbance.

2.66 **Furthermore, emotional and behavioural maladjustment is considered a transient phenomenon because favourable changes in home, school or social situation of the children or alterations in their perspectives about their immediate environment can help them adjust. There is therefore a case for returning students to mainstream schools as soon as they have adjusted satisfactorily, even before they have completed S3 studies.** It might be more effective in the long term to provide additional support to ordinary schools to help them meet the needs of troubled and troublesome students.

Audit recommendations on integration of students with emotional and behavioural problems

2.67 **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should:**

— **for students who show marked improvement in SSDs, take action to facilitate returning them to mainstream schools as soon as possible; and**

— **conduct an evaluation of the long-term improvement in behaviour, social adjustment and learning of students who have moved back to the mainstream after participating in the SSD programme.**

Response from the Administration

2.68 The **Director of Education** has said that the SSD provides an alternative education facility and intensive support for those who could not cope with the ordinary school environment despite that much effort has been made to help them improve. This is well recognised by the Report of Nine-year Compulsory Education 1997. Similar provision is commonplace in other countries as an essential support to the ordinary school system. The Director has also said that:

— the short-term adjustment programme offered by SSDs, where children with behavioural and emotional problems from ordinary schools come for intervention and support for 6 to 12 months, does facilitate the return of these students to mainstream once they have shown marked and steady progress; and

— whether SSD students can make continuous progress after returning to ordinary schools or taking up employment depends on many factors. Hence, it is hard to set criteria to evaluate their long-term improvement. At present, school social workers of SSDs do follow up on the school leavers' well being for a year or so. The ED will explore with SSDs ways of conducting the evaluation.

PART 3: STUDENT SUICIDE

BACKGROUND

3.1　　　This PART attempts to assess the provision of support services for preventing student suicide.　Audit has identified scope for improvement in addressing the problem in the following paragraphs.

3.2　　　Each year a number of primary and secondary students attempt or commit suicide.　The death of a child is a tragedy to the family members who suffer from the grief of the loss of a child or sibling.　This is also a traumatic experience to the child's peers.　They require guidance and counselling to help them overcome the depression and the distress they have experienced.

Number of students who attempted or committed suicide

3.3　　　In the past seven years, there was a total of 121 fatal cases and 302 attempted cases of student suicide (see Table 3 below).　On average 17 students committed suicides and another 43 students attempted suicides in a year.　The age of these children varied (see Table 4 below). The youngest one only aged eight.

Table 3

Number of student suicide cases
(school years 1991-92 to 1997-98)

	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	Total
Fatal cases	21	22	12	14	17	20 (Note)	15 (Note)	**121**
Attempted cases	46	86	54	43	28	21	24	**302**

Source:　ED's records

Note:　　The figure includes a student from special school.

Table 4

Age distribution of students who committed suicide
(school years 1991-92 to 1997-98)

School year	Age group				Total
	6 — 9	10 — 12	13 — 15	16 and above (Note)	
1991-92	0	5	9	7	21
1992-93	0	5	8	9	22
1993-94	0	3	7	2	12
1994-95	0	4	5	5	14
1995-96	1	5	6	5	17
1996-97	2	4	10	4	20
1997-98	0	4	6	5	15
Total	3	30	51	37	121

Source: ED's records

Note: This age group refers to students up to Secondary 7.

3.4   Student suicide is a problem faced by mainstream schools and special schools. In the past seven years, two students who committed suicide came from special schools. There is little evidence showing that students with SEN are more suicide-prone.

Public concern about student suicide

3.5   In 1997, student suicide was widely discussed in the Legislative Council (LegCo). Members expressed grave concern about student suicide cases. They urged the Administration to provide adequate resources to deal with the problem of student suicide in a comprehensive manner.

Factors leading to student suicide

3.6   According to the analysis of the student suicide cases conducted by the ED for the school years 1994-95 to 1997-98, the following were the factors that had led to student suicide:

(a) abnormal emotional reaction;

(b) poor family relationship/management;

(c) school/learning problem;

(d) boy-girl relationship;

(e) psychiatric problem;

(f) personality problem;

(g) poor peer relationship; and

(h) others (such as health problem, substance abuse and trouble with the police).

3.7   Among these various factors, the ED considered that there were two major factors that had led to many cases of suicide. **Poor family relationship/management** was considered the major underlying factor. This included problems such as family discord, inadequate parent-child communication, inadequate or inconsistent child management, lack of parental support, etc. **Abnormal emotional reaction** was considered the other major factor that triggered a suicidal attempt. This included students' overreaction to apparently trivial events such as scolding or accusations by their parents, teachers or peers.

Remedial and preventive measures to address the student suicide problem

3.8   Since 1991-92 and 1992-93, in which 21 and 22 fatal cases of student suicide were recorded, the ED has taken a series of actions to tackle the problem.

3.9   In April 1992, a task group was formed within the ED to review the departmental procedures in dealing with student suicide and to study in depth all student suicide cases known to the ED, so as to find out the causes of each case and subsequently to recommend appropriate immediate and long-term remedial and preventive measures.

3.10   The ED has introduced a multi-dimensional preventive programme which aims at working with the students, their parents, teachers and the community. Some of the programme's prominent measures are as follows:

— **For schools and teachers.** To strengthen the teachers' skills in handling the problem of student suicide, seminars and workshops by both overseas and local experts are conducted;

— **For students.** A new school subject "General Studies" has been introduced into the primary school curriculum in the school year since 1996-97 with the objective of strengthening students' inter-personal skills and their ability to cope with the changing society in a positive manner; and

— **For parents and community.** Information on good parenting and parent-child communication is disseminated to parents of primary and secondary school students.

3.11   In addition to the efforts of the ED, the SWD and non-government organisations (NGOs) also help students, in terms of both preventive and remedial actions. These actions include provision of family counselling service, provision of social work support in schools, organisation of family life education programmes and other activities such as workshops, camping trips, film shows and drama competitions.

Audit review

3.12   Against the background outlined in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.11 above, Audit carried out a review to ascertain if there is further scope for improvement in dealing with the problem of student suicide. Audit conducted a questionnaire survey (Note 4) on parents to ascertain their perception and understanding of the problem.

**PARENTS' AWARENESS OF THE
MAJOR FACTORS LEADING TO STUDENT SUICIDE**

3.13   Parents were asked in the survey to select the first and second major factors from a list of eight factors that had led to student suicide (see paragraph 3.6 above). Table 5 below shows the parents' perception of the two major factors that cause student suicide.

Note 4:   *Audit selected, on a random basis, 12 primary schools and 12 secondary schools for the questionnaire survey. Each of the schools selected was requested to distribute the questionnaires to the students of any two classes of Primary 6 (for primary schools) or Secondary 3 (for secondary schools) for completion by their parents. 1,770 questionnaires were issued. 866 questionnaires (a response rate of 49%) were returned to Audit.*

Table 5

Parents' perception of major factors causing student suicide

Factor	Number of parents (%) who selected this as the first major factor		Number of parents (%) who selected this as the second major factor	
Poor family relationship/management	324	(37%)	181	(21%)
Abnormal emotional reaction (overreaction to apparently trivial events)	173	(20%)	99	(11%)
School/learning problem	122	(14%)	158	(18%)
Boy-girl relationship	115	(14%)	142	(16%)
Psychiatric problem	59	(7%)	101	(12%)
Personality problem	54	(6%)	130	(15%)
Poor peer relationship	10	(1%)	49	(6%)
Others	9	(1%)	6	(1%)
Total	**866**	**(100%)**	**866**	**(100%)**

Source: Audit's survey

3.14   The results of the survey showed that:

—   37% of the parents considered poor family relationship/management as the first major factor; and

—   20% of the parents considered abnormal emotional reaction of students as the first major factor that caused student suicide.

3.15   Audit also noted that, of the 866 parents who returned the questionnaires, only 100 (12%) of them had selected both poor family relationship/management and abnormal emotional reaction of students as the two major factors.

Audit observations and recommendations
on parents' awareness of student suicide

3.16   As stated in paragraph 3.7 above, the ED's analysis of student suicide cases showed that poor family relationship/management was a major underlying factor, while abnormal emotional reaction of students (to apparently trivial events such as parents' accusations) was a major triggering factor.   However, the results of the Audit's survey indicate that many parents did not consider these two factors as major factors leading to student suicide.   Parents need to realise the significance of these two factors so that they could pay more attention to their children's needs, improve relationship with their children, and become more alert to their emotions.   This could help bring down the number of cases of student suicide.

3.17   Audit has *recommended* that the Administration should, through appropriate means such as issuing information leaflets and organising seminars, make more parents aware of:

— **the importance of good family relationship and parental support for their children; and**

— **the importance of being alert to the emotional problems faced by their children.**

Response from the Administration

3.18   The **Director of Education** has said that:

— the message is being conveyed through home-school functions and regular contacts between teachers and parents; and

— the ED will continue to put across the message through the organisation of seminars and publication of information leaflets.

SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED TO PARENTS

3.19   As mentioned in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.11 above, the Administration has taken actions to deal with the problem of student suicide.   It is important that these actions are effective.   In the Audit's survey, parents were also asked, for the 1998-99 school year:

—   whether their children's schools had set up Parent-teacher Associations (PTAs), organised activities for the families and distributed leaflets on good parenting and parent-child communication;

—   whether they were aware that the SWD and other NGOs had provided family counselling service and organised family life education programmes and other activities such as workshops, camping trips, film shows and drama competitions for young people and their families; and

—   whether they had watched programmes produced by the Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) or listened to public messages through radio and TV announcements about family education and growth of children.

The results of the survey are shown in Appendix D.

**Audit observations and recommendations
on support services provided to parents**

3.20   33% to 53% of the parents surveyed (see Table A of Appendix D) stated that some forms of the support services were not available in their children's schools. Audit noted that, even within the same school, while some parents stated that support services were available, other parents claimed that such services were not available. **Apparently many parents were not aware of the availability of support services.** They may be able to make better use of the services if they are made aware of such services or these services are provided more frequently.

3.21   **The majority of the parents (ranging from 51% to 64% — see Table B of Appendix D) were not aware of the support services provided by the SWD and NGOs.** It is important to make parents aware of the support services provided by the SWD and other NGOs where they could seek help when they face family problems.

3.22   **A significant proportion of the parents (28% and 40% — see Table C of Appendix D) have not watched TV programmes or listened to radio broadcasts relating to family education and growth of children for the 1998-99 school year.** It seems that enhancing the publicity of these family education programmes and broadcasts will get the message across to more parents.

3.23   An article published by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 1999 states that:

"With support from family and professional treatment, children and teenagers who are suicidal can heal and return to a more healthy path of development".

Audit has *recommended* that:

— **the Director of Education should encourage schools to enhance the support services (e.g. organising family activities, setting up of PTAs) so as to strengthen the parent-child and home-school relationship;**

— **the Administration should enhance the promotion of the various support services provided by the SWD and the NGOs in order to help parents faced with family problems; and**

— **the Administration should review its publicity strategy so as to improve parents' awareness of family education programmes and of the need to strengthen parent-child relationship.**

Response from the Administration

3.24   The **Director of Education** has said that the Home-School Cooperation Committee, set up by the ED in 1993 at the recommendation of Education Commission Report No. 5, has been playing a pivotal role in promoting home-school cooperation and strengthening parent-child relationship.   The ED will continue to encourage schools to set up PTAs, organise activities to promote home-school cooperation and strengthen parent-child relationship through allocation of funds to the Home-School Cooperation Committee.

3.25   The **Director of Social Welfare** has said that:

— the SWD is making due effort to enhance the promotion of various support services. Continuous promotion work is carried out on family service centre service and family life education programme.   Families and individuals facing stress and problems are encouraged to seek early help from family services centres.   Family life education promotes public education that a harmonious family would give strength and support to each and every member of the family to cope with difficulties in life; and

— promotion work is carried out both at the central and district level, through publicity campaign, mass media, web-site, parent education programmes and dissemination of information through easily accessible contact points for members of the public such as the Home Affairs Department and public housing estates.   Through the cooperation of social workers in the SWD and other professionals, concerted efforts will continue to be made to facilitate parents who need assistance.

EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED TO PARENTS

3.26   In the Audit's survey, parents were also asked whether they considered the various support services provided by the Government and NGOs were effective in preventing student suicide. Parents were requested to rate their response on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 meaning very ineffective and 7 meaning very effective). Their ratings are summarised in Table 6 below.

Table 6

**Parents' ratings on the effectiveness of
support services in preventing student suicide**

Parents' ratings	Number of parents (%)			
7 (very effective)	102	(13%)		
6	83	(10%)	385	(48%)
5	200	(25%)		
4	226	(28%)	226	(28%)
3	113	(14%)		
2	44	(6%)	187	(24%)
1 (very ineffective)	30	(4%)		
Total	**798** (Note)	**(100%)**		

Source: Audit's survey

Note: Of the 866 parents who returned the questionnaires, 798 parents answered this question.

**Audit observations and recommendations on
effectiveness of support services provided to parents**

3.27   Table 6 above shows that, although 48% of the parents considered that the support services were effective in preventing student suicide, the majority (52%) either gave a neutral view (28%), or considered such services ineffective (24%).

3.28   **Furthermore, of the total of 866 parents who returned the questionnaires, 355 (41%) gave their comments on how the problem of student suicide might be better addressed.** This indicates that many parents consider that there is further scope for improvement in addressing the problem of student suicide. The comments of these 355 parents are summarised in Appendix E.

3.29   **Audit has *recommended* that the Administration should:**

—   **consider conducting a review of the effectiveness of the ED's and the SWD's support services with a view to further improving the services;**

—   **in reviewing the effectiveness of the services, take due account of parents' views; and**

—   **consider reviewing the effectiveness of the services on a regular basis.**

Response from the Administration

3.30   The **Director of Education** has said that the ED has been monitoring the effectiveness of the home-school cooperation activities which aim at enhancing communication between parents, students and schools. The ED will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of these activities regularly and make improvement where necessary.

3.31   The **Director of Social Welfare** has said that it is an ongoing practice to review the effectiveness of the support services, such as foster care service and occasional child care service, in order to ascertain if improvement is needed to meet changing social needs. In these reviews, users including parents have been involved whenever appropriate. Another review under planning is on family life education service with the objective to make the service more geared towards changing community needs.

EFFECTS OF MEDIA ON STUDENT SUICIDE

3.32   In examining the issue of student suicide, Audit noted that in 1997, at the LegCo meeting which discussed the issue of student suicide (see paragraph 3.5 above), some Members expressed concern about the possible impact of excessive and sensational media coverage of student suicide in triggering more suicides. They were also concerned about a growing number of suicide victims in the younger age group, which might be the result of an imitational impact of the mass media on young children. The Director of Education stated that while the Administration had not been able to identify any causal effects of the media on student suicide, some precipitating factors were discernible in each case. Members considered that the media should be more vigilant and exercise

greater self-discipline in its reporting of suicide cases in order not to generate an adverse effect of triggering more suicides.

**Audit observations and recommendations
on effects of media on student suicide**

3.33   **Members of LegCo had called for vigilance in reporting student suicide cases by the media. Members' views had in fact also been shared by some parents in Audit's questionnaire survey. As shown in item (e) of Appendix E, 55 parents commented that the media should play a positive role in promoting proper values and should avoid sensational reporting of student suicide cases. Although the Administration was unable to establish that there was a direct causal relationship between the media and student suicide, some precipitating factors were apparent in each case. Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Education should, in consultation with the Information Services Department:**

—   **reflect the parents' concerns to the media; and**

—   **regularly apprise the media of the possible negative effects of sensational reporting of student suicide.**

Response from the Administration

3.34   The **Director of Education** has said that the ED accepts Audit's recommendation. In consultation with the Information Services Department, the ED will reflect the parents' concern for more vigilance in reporting student suicide cases to the media through the established channels of communication. In fact, many members of the press are aware of their social responsibility and have demonstrated self-discipline in avoiding overt sensational reporting of suicide for fear of possible negative effects on young people.

**Special education provision in 62 special schools
(1998-99 school year)**

	Approved capacity
Visually impaired (2 schools)	225
Hearing impaired (4 schools)	640
Schools for social development (7 schools)	945
Mildly and moderately mentally handicapped (7 schools) (Note)	1,610
Mildly mentally handicapped (10 schools)	2,000
Moderately mentally handicapped (14 schools)	1,320
Severely mentally handicapped (10 schools)	784
Physically handicapped (7 schools)	780
Hospital school (1 school)	465
	8,769
	(say 8,800)

Source: ED's records

*Note: Schools for the mildly and moderately mentally handicapped provide places for both mildly and
             moderately mentally handicapped students.*

Successful placement of S3 leavers with mental handicap (Note)

	Mild		Moderate		Severe	
	1996-97	1997-98	1996-97	1997-98	1996-97	1997-98
(A) Form of placement:						
Further education						
Ordinary school	0	0	0	0	0	0
Technical Institute	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vocational Training Centre	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rehabilitation programme						
Residential care	0	0	0	0	0	0
Day activity centre	4	4	38	47	18	43
Sheltered workshop	19	32	18	21	0	0
Skills centre	100	105	6	7	0	0
Employment						
Supported employment service	0	10	0	0	0	0
Open employment	6	6	0	1	0	0
Total of (A)	129	157	62	76	18	43
(B) No. of S3 leavers	**203**	**231**	**110**	**132**	**61**	**87**
Percentage [(A)/(B) ´ 100%]	**64%**	**68%**	**56%**	**58%**	**30%**	**49%**

Source: ED's records

Note: The placements were based on the figures as at September of each school year.

**Capacity of special schools and actual enrolment
1993-94 to 1998-99**

Type of school

	Visually impaired	Hearing impaired	School for social development	Mildly mentally handicapped	Moderately mentally handicapped	Severely mentally handicapped	Physically handicapped	Hospital school	Total
1993-94									
Capacity	210	740	900	2,960	1,880	752	690	435	8,567
Enrolment	147	615	766	2,681	1,605	671	656	333	7,474
%	**70.0**	**83.1**	**85.1**	**90.6**	**85.4**	**89.2**	**95.1**	**76.6**	**87.2**
1994-95									
Capacity	210	740	930	2,980	1,870	760	690	458	8,638
Enrolment	148	594	694	2,652	1,574	644	657	358	7,321
%	**70.5**	**80.3**	**74.6**	**89.0**	**84.2**	**84.7**	**95.2**	**78.2**	**84.8**
1995-96									
Capacity	210	740	915	3,020	1,860	760	690	481	8,676
Enrolment	145	567	649	2,654	1,569	650	652	406	7,292
%	**69.0**	**76.6**	**70.9**	**87.9**	**84.4**	**85.5**	**94.5**	**84.4**	**84.0**
1996-97									
Capacity	225	720	945	3,040	1,820	776	760	491	8,777
Enrolment	151	542	621	2,692	1,603	659	663	390	7,321
%	**67.1**	**75.3**	**65.7**	**88.6**	**88.1**	**84.9**	**87.2**	**79.4**	**83.4**
1997-98									
Capacity	225	680	945	3,040	1,860	776	780	465	8,771
Enrolment	153	524	695	2,708	1,657	668	687	426	7,518
%	**68.0**	**77.1**	**73.5**	**89.1**	**89.1**	**86.1**	**88.1**	**91.6**	**85.7**
1998-99									
Capacity	225	640	945	3,060	1,870	784	780	465	8,769
Enrolment	156	511	750	2,671	1,683	678	686	411	7,546
%	**69.3**	**79.8**	**79.4**	**87.3**	**90.0**	**86.5**	**87.9**	**88.4**	**86.1**

Source: ED's records

Audit's survey of parents
on support services for preventing student suicide

Table A

Parents' views on support services
provided by schools for school year 1998-99

Question	**Number of parents**	
Whether schools have provided the following support services?	**YES**	**NO**
A. Setting up Parent-teacher Association (in order to strengthen home-school liaison)	580 (67%)	**286 (33%)**
B. Organising family activities (e.g. games day, picnic)	434 (50%)	**432 (50%)**
C. Distributing leaflets on good parenting and parent-child communication	407 (47%)	**459 (53%)**

Source: Audit's survey

Table B

**Parents' views on support services
provided by the SWD or NGOs for school year 1998-99**

Question	Number of parents	
Whether parents are aware of the following support services provided?	**YES**	**NO**
A. Family counselling services	425 (49%)	**441 (51%)**
B. Family life education	314 (36%)	**552 (64%)**
C. Organisation of activities such as workshops, camping trips, film shows and drama competitions for young people and their families	338 (39%)	**528 (61%)**

Source: Audit's survey

Table C

**Parents' views on programmes/public messages
provided through TV and radio for school year 1998-99**

Question	Number of parents	
Whether parents have watched or listened to the following TV/radio programmes/public messages?	**YES**	**NO**
A. TV programmes on family life education and children's growth	622 (72%)	**244 (28%)**
B. Short public messages about parenting methods	521 (60%)	**345 (40%)**

Source: Audit's survey

Parents' comments on student suicide

Comments	Number of parents
(a) Parents' assistance and guidance are most important for children's growth. Parents should take the initiative to approach the children with signs of emotional problems and give timely assistance.	128
(b) Nowadays children tend to live a materialistic life and leave little time for learning proper values. Parents should not let their children indulge in materialistic satisfaction and should teach them proper values.	70
(c) Schools and parents should place less emphasis on academic results but more on children's character and moral development. Schools and parents should also avoid giving too much pressure and too harsh punishment on children.	68
(d) The influence of teachers and schools is important as students spend most time in school. Teachers should take the initiative to approach students with signs of emotional problems and give timely assistance. Schools should organise more activities to improve communication with parents.	67
(e) The mass media should play a positive role in promoting proper values to students while avoiding sensational reporting of student suicide cases. More programmes on family education and growth of children should be produced.	55
(f) The roles of schools, parents and students are equally important. Communication among them should be improved in order for them to play their roles properly.	32
(g) Students should be reminded that life is precious and suicide is a foolish act which cannot solve any problems.	29
(h) School social workers should take more initiative to approach students with signs of emotional problems. The number of school social workers should be increased.	20
(i) More activities should be organised to consume the energy of students and to divert their attention from unhappy events.	20

Source: Audit's survey

Acronyms and abbreviations

ECR4	Education Commission Report No. 4
ED	Education Department
LegCo	Legislative Council
NGOs	Non-government organisations
PAS	Peripatetic Advisory Service
PTAs	Parent-teacher Associations
PTS	Peripatetic Teaching Service
P1	Primary 1
P6	Primary 6
RC	Resource Classes
RTHK	Radio Television Hong Kong
SRSP	School-based Remedial Support Programme
SEN	Special educational needs
SRS	Supportive Remedial Service
SSD	School for social development
SWD	Social Welfare Department
S1	Secondary 1
S2	Secondary 2
S3	Secondary 3
S4	Secondary 4
S5	Secondary 5