

CHAPTER 5

**Education Bureau
Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department**

Special education

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SPECIAL EDUCATION

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SPECIAL EDUCATION

Executive Summary

1. Special Educational Needs (SEN) refer to the needs of students arising from various types of disabilities. The Education Bureau (EDB) classifies SEN into nine types, namely: (a) visual impairment (VI); (b) hearing impairment (HI); (c) physical disability (PD); (d) intellectual disability (ID); (e) specific learning difficulties; (f) attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder; (g) autism spectrum disorders; (h) speech and language impairment; and (i) mental illness. The Government adopts a dual-track mode in implementing special education. Children with more severe or multiple disabilities are placed in special schools for intensive support, subject to the assessment and recommendation of the specialists and with parents' consent. Other children with SEN who can participate in learning and daily activities in ordinary schools receive integrated education in ordinary schools.

2. Aided special schools receive subvention from EDB under the Code of Aid for Special Schools or Code of Aid for Aided Schools. They fall into six types, namely: (a) school for children with VI; (b) school for children with HI; (c) school for children with PD; (d) school for children with ID (schools for children with ID are further classified into schools for children with mild intellectual disability (MiID), schools for children with moderate intellectual disability (MoID) and schools for children with severe intellectual disability (SID)); (e) school for social development (SSD); and (f) Hospital School. Some special schools are provided with boarding facilities to cater for the long-term residential needs of students with severe disabilities and to facilitate them to receive school education during school days.

3. In school year 2018/19, there were 60 aided special schools and boarding services were provided in 28 of them (unless otherwise specified: (a) all years mentioned hereinafter refer to school years; and (b) the figures mentioned for a school year refer to the position as at 15 September of the respective school year). Of the 28 schools, 7 were SSDs and the boarding services for SSD students were provided by residential homes subvented by and under the purview of the Social Welfare Department (SWD). The boarding sections of the remaining 21 schools were subvented by and under the purview of EDB.

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4. In 2018/19, there were 7,939 students enrolled in the 60 special schools, comprising 3,783 primary school students and 4,156 secondary school students. Majority of the students enrolled in special schools were students with ID (including MiID, MoID or SID). Special Education is one of the programme areas of EDB. The amount of expenditure on the programme area increased by \$701.9 million (35%) from \$2,010.8 million in financial year 2014-15 to \$2,712.7 million in financial year 2018-19. The resources and support provided for special education include staffing (comprising teaching staff, specialist staff and non-specialist staff), professional development of staff, and various grants and support. Two Special Education Support Sections under the Special Education Division of EDB are responsible for special education services. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of EDB's work in the implementation of special education and SWD's work in connection with special education.

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

5. *Not all regions provided with all types of special school places.* Except for the Hospital School, EDB provides special school places either on a regional basis (a total of seven regions) or on a territory-wide basis. Audit reviewed the school places provided on a regional basis (i.e. the 7 schools for children with PD and the 41 schools for children with ID) and found that: (a) the Outlying Islands region did not have schools for children with PD and children with ID; and (b) the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region (excluding Tseung Kwan O) did not have schools for children with SID (paras. 2.2 and 2.3).

6. *Need to take measures to address the under-enrolment in some schools.* The enrolment in SSDs was not high in 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19. The overall enrolment rates of the eight SSDs were 51%, 53% and 57% respectively. In 2018/19, the enrolment rates of each of the eight SSDs ranged from 40% to 74% (paras. 2.5 and 2.7).

7. *Need to adopt more flexibility in placement arrangements for school-age students with ID and students with PD.* The placement arrangements for school-age students (i.e. students other than upcoming Primary One students) with ID and students with PD are more restrictive: (a) upcoming Primary One students with ID can apply for any school in the territory. However, school-age students with ID can only apply for a school whose Primary Catchment Area or Extended Catchment Area

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covers their residence; and (b) unlike the placement arrangements for upcoming Primary One students with SID which allow applications for any school in the territory, students with PD can only apply for a school whose catchment area covers their residence. However, for the provision of boarding places, EDB considers that both students with SID and students with PD have mobility problems and therefore, parents of students with SID or PD are subject to the same application restriction (para. 2.10).

8. ***Need to review reasons for prolonged enrolment of SSD students.*** SSDs aim to provide more intensive guidance to students so that they may reintegrate into ordinary schools as soon as possible. The short-term adjustment programme is implemented for students who are expected to be able to be discharged after receiving services at SSDs for three months to one year. For students not under the short-term adjustment programme, most students are expected to be able to achieve notable improvement and leave SSDs within two school years. Audit analysed the periods of stay in SSDs (between admission and discharge) for the students discharged from SSDs in the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18 and found that: (a) on average 41% of the students (ranging from 27% to 52%) under the short-term adjustment programme stayed in the schools for more than one year, and the longest period of stay (for one student discharged in 2013/14) was 3 years and 8 months; and (b) on average 46% of the students (ranging from 34% to 58%) not under the short-term adjustment programme stayed in the schools for more than two years, and the longest period of stay (for one student discharged in 2015/16) was 7 years (paras. 2.12 and 2.13).

9. ***Need to explore ways to rationalise boarding places for students with SID.*** Audit analysed the vacancy and waiting situation of boarding places in schools for children with SID and noted that as at 15 September 2018: (a) notwithstanding that there were 26 students waiting for seven-day boarding service, there were 40 vacant places for five-day boarding service; and (b) under the existing mechanism, applicants could only apply for either five-day boarding places or seven-day boarding places. Applicants awaiting seven-day boarding places would not be allocated five-day boarding places as a stopgap measure to partially meet their boarding needs before seven-day boarding places were available for them (para. 2.19).

10. ***Need to further increase the supply of new boarding places.*** As at 15 June 2019, there were 132 students with MoID waiting for boarding places (28 for five-day boarding service and 104 for seven-day boarding service). Audit noted that 8 (29%) of the 28 students awaiting five-day boarding service had been waiting for

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more than 1 year (the longest was 5 years and 10 months) and 65 (63%) of the 104 students awaiting seven-day boarding service had been waiting for more than 1 year (the longest was 3 years and 9 months). According to EDB's latest projection on the supply and demand of boarding places for students with MoID: (a) a significant level of shortfall of boarding places would persist in 2019/20 and 2020/21. The projected numbers of shortfall of boarding places were 161 places in 2019/20 and 125 places in 2020/21; and (b) notwithstanding that the shortfall of boarding places would improve from 161 places in 2019/20 to 29 places in 2025/26, there would still be a shortfall of boarding places throughout the projection period of seven school years (paras. 2.21, 2.22 and 2.25).

11. ***Need to explore ways to make good use of boarding places in SSDs.*** Each SSD and its residential home only admit students of a single gender. The utilisation of boarding places in SSDs for girls decreased from 73% in 2014/15 to 43% in 2018/19, and the number of vacant boarding places for girls increased from 55 in 2014/15 to 153 in 2018/19 (para. 2.26).

12. ***Need to provide assistance to special schools in reviewing the boarding needs of existing boarders.*** EDB entrusted special schools to ensure that boarding places were released by students who no longer have boarding needs, making such boarding places available for students with the most genuine needs. While special schools had developed their own school-based guidelines for conducting regular reviews of boarding needs of existing boarders, the schools expressed difficulties in conducting the reviews. EDB did not have information on the number of boarding places that were made available as a result of the regular reviews conducted by schools (para. 2.29).

13. ***Need to consider adopting more flexibility in placement arrangements of seven-day boarding service for students with SID or PD.*** EDB maintains a central queue for seven-day boarding service. Parents are required to indicate their preference on schools. For parents of a student with SID or PD, if they specify a particular school, they can only specify a school whose catchment area covers their residence. However, if they have no preference on a particular school, the student will be offered a boarding place as soon as it is available from any school regardless of the student's residential address. EDB needs to consider adopting more flexibility in the placement arrangements of seven-day boarding service for students with SID and students with PD (paras. 2.30 and 2.31).

Staffing of special schools

14. *Need to closely monitor wastage rate of special school teachers.* EDB defines the wastage rate of teachers in special schools as the number of drop-out teachers as a percentage of the total number of teachers in special schools in the preceding school year. Audit found that in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19: (a) the wastage rate of teachers in special schools was higher than that for teachers in ordinary schools; and (b) the wastage rate of teachers in special schools had increased significantly from 6.8% in 2014/15 to 8.5% in 2018/19 (paras. 3.2 and 3.3).

15. *Difficulties in filling posts of occupational therapists and physiotherapists.* In 2018/19, the establishment of specialist staff for the 60 special schools was 1,181 staff. Among the various types of specialist staff, it was particularly difficult to have all occupational therapist (OT) and physiotherapist (PT) posts filled. To alleviate the recruitment difficulties, EDB allows special schools to freeze the unfilled posts of OTs and PTs in return for cash grants for hiring short-term or part-time occupational therapy and physiotherapy services. Audit found that the vacancy situation of OTs and PTs in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 remained serious after some of the posts had been frozen: (a) the average number of unfilled posts as a percentage of the establishment was 37% (ranging from 22% to 49%) for OTs and 44% (ranging from 39% to 48%) for PTs; and (b) after freezing some unfilled posts, the average percentage of vacant posts remained as high as 13% (ranging from 8% to 17%) for OTs and 15% (ranging from 10% to 22%) for PTs (paras. 3.8 and 3.9).

16. *High vacancy of some types of non-specialist staff.* In 2018/19, the establishment of non-specialist staff was 792 staff. High vacancy rates existed in four types of non-specialist staff, namely teacher assistants (18%), cooks (16%), workshop attendants (15%) and watchmen (12%). Audit analysed the vacancy rates of these four types of non-specialist staff for the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 and found that the vacancy rates of three of the four types of non-specialist staff (i.e. except watchmen) had shown an increasing trend since 2016/17 (paras. 3.11 to 3.13).

17. *Need to monitor the attainment of teacher training target.* In 2018/19, after consulting the special school sector, EDB set a teacher training target for all special schools, namely by the end of 2022/23, each special school should have 85% to 100% of its teachers having completed specified special education training (SET).

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Audit found that: (a) EDB recognised teachers in special schools who had completed structured training courses that were equivalent to the Training Course for Special School Teachers (TCSST) as teachers who had completed SET. However, EDB had not promulgated the recognition criteria to help teachers and principals understand whether the courses attended by teachers were equivalent to TCSST; and (b) individual schools did not know the percentage of their teachers who had completed SET (paras. 3.18 and 3.19).

18. ***Need to increase the number of training places of TCSST.*** In view of the different educational needs of students enrolled in special schools, TCSST specifically offered to special school teachers has been launched since 2012/13 and 40 training places have been provided by EDB each year. The feedback on TCSST from the special school sector was good and positive, and all the 40 training places were fully enrolled in 2018/19. To facilitate special schools in achieving the teacher training target of 85% to 100% by 2022/23, EDB needs to keep in view the adequacy of TCSST training places and increase the number of places where necessary (paras. 3.17, 3.20 and 3.21).

19. ***Decreasing percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification.*** The percentage of teachers in special schools with special education training qualification is one of the key performance measures in EDB's Controlling Officer's Report. Audit found that: (a) the percentage increased from 73.4% in 2014/15 to 75% in 2016/17 and then decreased to 70.5% in 2018/19; and (b) of the 60 special schools in 2018/19, 7 (11.6%) schools had less than half of the teachers with special education training qualification (paras. 3.22 and 3.23).

Grants and support for special education

20. ***Need to encourage participation in sharing sessions.*** Since 2009/10, EDB has adopted the Tripartite Model of Support (TMS) to enhance the communication and collaboration with special schools as well as strengthen professional development of teachers. Since 2016/17, EDB has arranged a sharing session for special schools after conducting theme-based visits to schools. In the period from 2016/17 to 2018/19, four sharing sessions were held. Audit found that the percentage of special schools participating in the sharing sessions was not high, ranging from 45.9% to 70.0% and averaging 54.4% (paras. 4.2 and 4.3).

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21. ***Need to ensure that the amount of support grant is adequate to meet the needs of special schools.*** The Additional Support Grant for Day Students and Day Students cum Boarders with Medical Complexity (hereinafter referred to as Day MC Grant) was launched in 2017/18. Special schools can use the Day MC Grant for employing additional staff such as health care workers, procuring health care services or arranging staff training. The suspected students with medical complexity (MC) are put up by special schools. The medical assessment for paediatric cases of suspected students with MC is conducted by the Hospital Authority (HA) and arranged through EDB. Audit found that: (a) not all the suspected cases initially reported by schools were assessed; and (b) the arrangement with HA for conducting medical assessments was a one-off ad hoc task. The processing of the Day MC Grant will be seriously affected should HA cease to conduct medical assessments on paediatric cases of suspected day students with MC (paras. 4.9 to 4.11 and 4.14).

22. ***Inconsistent provision of funding support for furniture and equipment (F&E) procured using different funding sources.*** Some F&E items such as ceiling hoist would greatly enhance the special schools' support provided to children with MC. Audit reviewed the funding support for ceiling hoist and noted inconsistent provision of funding support by EDB to existing special schools and a new special school for children with ID. While the new special school could use its block grant to fully cover the recurrent cost of ceiling hoists, the existing special schools could use the surplus of their block grant to cover no more than 25% of the recurrent cost of ceiling hoists that they acquired through their own funding sources (paras. 4.19 and 4.20).

23. ***Need to provide more assistance to students in school leaving arrangements.*** Special school leavers mainly have the following school leaving arrangements: (a) employment in open market; (b) further studies; (c) vocational training; (d) vocational rehabilitation services; (e) day training or care services; and (f) other arrangements (e.g. staying at home). In the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18, significant percentages of special school leavers who had applied for vocational rehabilitation services and day training or care services were on the waiting lists (ranging from 13.2% to 38.0% and 13.3% to 64.7% respectively). Moreover, Audit examined the reasons for special school students to extend their years of study for the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18 and found that in each of the five years, 42.7% to 56.8% (averaging 48.6%) of students had their years of study extended by schools after their difficulties in school leaving arrangements were taken into account (paras. 4.23, 4.25 and 4.26).

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Audit recommendations

24. Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary. Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

- (a) consider expanding the scope of target students of special schools as far as practicable so that children with PD in the Outlying Islands region and children with SID in the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region can be better catered for in their own regions (para. 2.14(b));
- (b) take measures to address the issue of low enrolment of students in SSDs (para. 2.14(c));
- (c) consider adopting more flexibility in the placement arrangements for school-age students with ID and students with PD (para. 2.14(d));
- (d) review the reasons why more than 40% of students, on average, stayed in SSDs beyond the expected timeframe (para. 2.14(e));
- (e) ascertain whether more guidance and advice should be given to referrers of SSDs so that they can better identify students suitable for the short-term adjustment programme (para. 2.14(f));
- (f) explore the feasibility of implementing measures with a view to making more efficient use of the boarding places and shortening the waiting time for seven-day boarding places in schools for children with SID (para. 2.33(a));
- (g) step up EDB's efforts in exploring effective measures to increase the supply of new boarding places with a view to shortening the waiting time of students with MoID for boarding services (para. 2.33(b));
- (h) provide assistance to special schools in reviewing the boarding needs of existing boarders (para. 2.33(c));

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- (i) consider adopting more flexibility in the placement arrangements of seven-day boarding service (para. 2.33(d));

Staffing of special schools

- (j) explore appropriate measures to address the relatively higher wastage rate of special school teachers (para. 3.5);
- (k) take measures to address the difficulties faced by special schools in filling OT and PT posts (para. 3.14(a));
- (l) monitor the vacancy situation of non-specialist staff in special schools (para. 3.14(b));
- (m) promulgate the recognition criteria of training courses that are equivalent to TCSST (para. 3.25(a));
- (n) regularly ascertain the percentage of teachers who have completed SET in each special school and monitor the progress of attaining the target of 85% to 100% by 2022/23, and increase the number of TCSST training places where necessary (para. 3.25(b) and (c));
- (o) take measures to increase the percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification (para. 3.25(d));

Grants and support for special education

- (p) take appropriate measures to encourage special schools' participation in sharing sessions under Cross-Sector Communication of TMS (para. 4.6(a));
- (q) in collaboration with the Chief Executive of HA, take measures to ensure that special schools are provided with Day MC Grant that can adequately meet their needs (para. 4.15); and

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- (r) consider ways to support special schools which had acquired F&E items through their own funding sources that were not in the schools' F&E list but were subsequently included in the F&E list of new special schools (para. 4.21(b)).

25. Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Social Welfare should keep in view the utilisation of boarding places in residential homes of SSDs and continue to take measures to make good use of the vacant boarding places where appropriate (para. 2.34).

26. Audit has also *recommended* that the Secretary for Education and the Director of Social Welfare should, in collaboration with other stakeholders, provide more assistance to special school students in their school leaving arrangements (para. 4.28).

Response from the Government

27. The Secretary for Education and the Director of Social Welfare agree with the audit recommendations.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 This PART describes the background to the audit and outlines the audit objectives and scope.

Background

1.2 Special Educational Needs (SEN) refer to the needs of students arising from various types of disabilities. The Education Bureau (EDB) classifies SEN into nine types:

- (a) visual impairment (VI);
- (b) hearing impairment (HI);
- (c) physical disability (PD);
- (d) intellectual disability (ID);
- (e) specific learning difficulties;
- (f) attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder;
- (g) autism spectrum disorders;
- (h) speech and language impairment; and
- (i) mental illness.

1.3 The Government adopts a dual-track mode in implementing special education. Under the dual-track mode:

- (a) children with more severe or multiple disabilities whose support needs cannot be adequately catered for in a general education setting and who

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need to pursue an adapted or modified curriculum or receive specialised intervention whilst pursuing an ordinary curriculum are placed in special schools for intensive support, subject to the assessment and recommendations of the specialists and with parents' consent. These children include:

- (i) children with ID who display marked difficulty in cognition and adaptive skills. They need to follow a modified curriculum and receive professional support from specialists; and
- (ii) children with VI, HI or PD who need to receive specialised intervention. For instance, children with VI who suffer from moderate low vision or below will display marked difficulty in pursuing ordinary curriculum even if they have average intellectual functioning. They need to receive specialised intervention such as learning braille and receiving orientation and mobility training.

In the school year 2018/19, there were 7,939 students enrolled in special schools, comprising 3,783 primary school students and 4,156 secondary school students (see paras. 1.7 and 1.8) (Note 1); and

- (b) other children with SEN who can participate in learning and daily activities in ordinary schools through having accommodation in teaching, curriculum and assessment receive integrated education in ordinary schools so that they can interact with ordinary children and benefit from mainstream education. These children include:
 - (i) children with specific learning difficulties, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, speech and language impairment, or mental illness; and
 - (ii) children with VI, HI, PD or ID who have less severe disabilities.

Note 1: *Unless otherwise specified: (a) all years mentioned in this Audit Report refer to school years, which start on 1 September and end on 31 August of the following year; and (b) the figures mentioned for a school year refer to the position as at 15 September of the respective school year.*

Majority of the students receiving integrated education in ordinary schools are children with specific learning difficulties, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorders, or speech and language impairment. In 2018/19, there were 46,090 such children, representing about 94% of the 49,080 children with SEN studying in public sector ordinary schools.

Special schools

Types of special schools

1.4 Aided special schools (Note 2) receive subvention from EDB under the Code of Aid for Special Schools or Code of Aid for Aided Schools. They fall into six types:

- (a) ***School for children with VI.*** VI refers to the vision of the better eye which, even with eyeglasses or corrective surgery, cannot be corrected to the normal level. Ophthalmologists will classify an individual as having mild low vision, moderate low vision, severe low vision or total blindness according to his or her visual acuity, visual field and other contributing factors. EDB will place children with moderate low vision or below to schools for children with VI;
- (b) ***School for children with HI.*** HI refers to a disorder in any part of the auditory system that affects the hearing ability, and thus affects the speech and communication abilities of an individual. HI is classified into five degrees, namely Mild, Moderate, Moderately Severe, Severe, and Profound. EDB will place children with Severe or Profound HI or those who cannot construct knowledge because of inadequate speech abilities due to HI to the school for children with HI;

Note 2: *In addition to the aided special schools, there is one special school operated by the English Schools Foundation established under the English Schools Foundation Ordinance (Cap. 1117). The Ordinance empowers the Foundation to make regulations for matters including the internal management, operation, administration and control of the school. This review did not cover this special school.*

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- (c) ***School for children with PD.*** PD refers to the disability caused by diseases of central and peripheral neurological systems, traumas or other congenital diseases of the musculoskeletal systems, which leads to hindrance or limitations in one or more aspects in daily living. Examples of PD include cerebral palsy, spina bifida and muscular dystrophy. Subject to the assessment and recommendations of medical experts, EDB will place children with more severe PD or multiple disabilities to schools for children with PD;
- (d) ***School for children with ID.*** ID refers to significantly sub-average intellectual ability accompanied by marked limitations in learning and adapting to life. Compared with peers of the same age, children with ID generally show difficulties in areas including cognition, memory, attention, language, perceptual motor, and adaptive skills. Schools for children with ID are classified into three types:
- (i) schools for children with mild intellectual disability (MiID);
 - (ii) schools for children with moderate intellectual disability (MoID);
and
 - (iii) schools for children with severe intellectual disability (SID).

EDB will place children with various degrees of ID into the respective types of schools;

- (e) ***School for social development (SSD).*** SSDs are set up to provide education for students with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural problems. Apart from the formal curriculum, SSDs also provide counselling service to help the students overcome their emotional and behavioural problems so that they can integrate into mainstream schools as soon as possible. EDB and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) jointly manage the Central Co-ordinating Referral Mechanism (CCRM) to assess the needs of the students for placement in SSDs and make referral where appropriate. CCRM consists of the relevant professionals, including social workers, inspectors of referral and placement team, educational counsellors and educational psychologists; and

- (f) ***Hospital School.*** The Hospital School operates classes at public hospitals and the School provides education (Primary 1 to Secondary 6) to hospitalised school-age children starting from 5 years 8 months, i.e. minimum age for Primary One students. The students can be admitted on the third day of their hospitalisation. They have lessons either in classrooms or at wards. Those who are less mobile or having special health conditions receive individual bedside teaching. Students who are homebound can continue their education by the School's Home-based Teaching Program through the referral by EDB.

Some special schools are provided with boarding facilities for students. The objective of providing boarding facilities in special schools is to cater for the long-term residential needs of students with severe disabilities and to facilitate them to receive school education during school days. Two types of boarding services, namely five-day boarding service and seven-day boarding service, are provided to students. Boarding services for SSD students are provided by residential homes subvented by and under the purview of SWD. The boarding sections of other types of special schools are subvented by and under the purview of EDB. In 2018/19, there were 60 aided special schools and boarding services were provided in 28 of them. Table 1 shows the number of special schools by types and the number of special schools with a boarding section in 2018/19.

Introduction

Table 1

**Number of special schools analysed by types and
number of special schools providing boarding services
(2018/19)**

School type	No. of schools	No. of schools providing boarding services			
		Five-day boarding service only (a)	Seven-day boarding service only (b)	Both types of boarding services (c)	Total (d) = (a) + (b) + (c)
School for children with VI	2	0	0	2	2
School for children with HI	1	0	1	0	1
School for children with PD	7	0	0	4	4
School for children with ID					
— MiID	12	0	0	0	0
— MoID	14	2	0	2	4
— MiID and MoID (Note 1)	5	0	0	1	1
— SID	10	4	0	5	9
SSD (Note 2)	8	0	7	0	7
Hospital School (Note 3)	1	Not applicable			
Total	60	6	8	14	28

Source: EDB records

Note 1: There were five special schools that admitted both children with MiID and children with MoID. Therefore, there were 17 (12+5) schools that admitted children with MiID and 19 (14+5) schools that admitted children with MoID. Children with MiID were not eligible for boarding services.

Note 2: In 7 of the 8 SSDs, there were residential homes subvented by and under the purview of SWD.

Note 3: Students of the Hospital School were patients either staying in hospitals or staying at home.

Curriculum and duration of course in special schools

1.5 Since the implementation of the New Academic Structure in 2009/10, special schools have offered free senior secondary education for their students. Under the principle of “One Curriculum Framework for All”, special schools adopt the Hong Kong School Curriculum framework to develop a school-based curriculum relevant to the learning capabilities and characteristics of their students. In practice:

- (a) students with ID in special schools will not pursue the ordinary curriculum and will not go through ordinary assessments and examinations. They will be provided with individualised education programme tailored by their teachers; and
- (b) students in special schools who are intellectually capable of pursuing the ordinary curriculum will follow the ordinary curriculum and be assessed with appropriate accommodation in the same way as other students in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination.

1.6 In general, the age of admission of children to a special school is 5 years 8 months and they are provided with free and universal basic education. Special schools for children with ID and children with VI offer a 12-year academic structure (comprising six years of primary, three years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary education) whereas special schools for children with PD and children with HI offer a 13-year academic structure (comprising ten years of basic education and three years of senior secondary education — Note 3). Special schools are required

Note 3: *According to EDB, children with PD have severe or multiple physical disabilities, and children with Severe or Profound HI have difficulties in language acquisition and development as well as in auditory reception and oral expression. The learning of these students is regularly and frequently disrupted by hospitalisation and the need to receive therapies. As these children are capable of following the ordinary curriculum and attending the public examinations, EDB considers it appropriate to provide them with an additional year of study in order to prepare them better for the public examinations.*

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to give each student an academic structure status at the time of admission. A student would be assigned to the same class level with other children of the same age under normal circumstances. After admission, the status will be adjusted on a one-grade-per-year basis. Students of special schools will graduate upon completion of Secondary 6 (Note 4).

Number of students enrolled in special schools

1.7 In 2018/19, there were 7,939 students enrolled in the 60 special schools, comprising 3,783 primary school students and 4,156 secondary school students (see para. 1.3(a)). In the same school year, the number of students enrolled in 541 ordinary primary schools and 472 secondary schools (Note 5) were 349,745 and 308,020 respectively. Table 2 shows the numbers of students enrolled in special schools, and in ordinary primary and secondary schools in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19.

Note 4: *Under special circumstances, individual students may need to extend their years of study. Valid reasons for the extension of years of study include frequent absence from school, major disruptions in learning and serious adaptation problems (see para. 4.24).*

Note 5: *Ordinary schools include government schools, aided schools, caput schools (for secondary schools only), schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme, and private schools.*

Table 2

**Number of students enrolled in special schools and
enrolled in ordinary primary schools and secondary schools
(2014/15 to 2018/19)**

School type	No. of students					Change between 2014/15 and 2018/19
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
Primary education						
Enrolled in ordinary schools (a)	309,107	317,119	327,915	340,137	349,745	+40,638 (+13%)
Enrolled in special schools (b)	3,191	3,337	3,423	3,610	3,783	+592 (+19%)
Sub-total (c)=(a)+(b)	312,298	320,456	331,338	343,747	353,528	+41,230 (+13%)
Secondary education						
Enrolled in ordinary schools (d)	356,689	336,079	321,488	313,848	308,020	-48,669 (-14%)
Enrolled in special schools (e)	4,452	4,366	4,259	4,216	4,156	-296 (-7%)
Sub-total (f)=(d)+(e)	361,141	340,445	325,747	318,064	312,176	-48,965 (-14%)
Primary education and secondary education						
Enrolled in ordinary schools (g)=(a)+(d)	665,796	653,198	649,403	653,985	657,765	-8,031 (-1%)
Enrolled in special schools (h)=(b)+(e)	7,643	7,703	7,682	7,826	7,939	+296 (+4%)
Total (i)=(c)+(f)	673,439	660,901	657,085	661,811	665,704	-7,735 (-1%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Remarks: The figures did not include students enrolled in the special school operated by the English Schools Foundation. In the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19, the number of students enrolled in the school ranged from 67 to 70.

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1.8 Table 3 shows the number of students enrolled in special schools analysed by student type for the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 (Note 6). Majority of the students enrolled in special schools were students with ID. In 2018/19, there were 5,964 students with ID (comprising 3,218 students with MiID, 2,040 students with MoID and 706 students with SID), representing about 75% of the 7,939 students enrolled in special schools.

Table 3

**Number of students enrolled in special schools analysed by student type
(2014/15 to 2018/19)**

Student type	No. of students					Change between 2014/15 and 2018/19
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
Students with VI	126	125	123	112	110	-16 (-13%)
Students with HI	102	87	89	84	64	-38 (-37%)
Students with PD	921	915	883	877	907	-14 (-2%)
Students with ID						
— MiID	3,051	3,049	3,103	3,154	3,218	+167 (+5%)
— MoID	1,865	1,879	1,911	1,992	2,040	+175 (+9%)
— SID	691	679	687	699	706	+15 (+2%)
Students enrolled in SSDs	632	600	553	594	614	-18 (-3%)
Students enrolled in Hospital School	255	369	333	314	280	+25 (+10%)
Overall	7,643	7,703	7,682	7,826	7,939	+296 (+4%)

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

Note 6: *There were 60 aided special schools in the period from 2014/15 to 2016/17. In 2017/18, a new SSD started operation and the number of special schools in 2017/18 became 61. Since 2018/19, a school for children with HI has fully mainstreamed to an ordinary school and ceased to provide special school places. The number of special schools in 2018/19 restored to 60.*

Resources and support for special education

1.9 Special Education is one of the programme areas of EDB. The amount of expenditure on the programme area increased by \$701.9 million (35%) from \$2,010.8 million in financial year 2014-15 to \$2,712.7 million in financial year 2018-19 (see Table 4). The following resources and support are provided for special education:

- (a) **Staffing.** To cater for the specific needs of the students, in addition to teaching staff, different types of special schools are also provided with specialist staff and non-specialist staff:
 - (i) **Teaching staff.** In view of the intensive support needs of their students, special schools have implemented small class teaching. Classes of special schools are smaller than those in ordinary schools, ranging from 8 to 15 students per class. The staffing ratio for primary and junior secondary classes is 1.8 teachers per class. As for senior secondary classes, the staffing ratio is 2.0 teachers per class for children with ID and 2.1 teachers per class for special schools offering the ordinary curriculum. In addition, to cater for the diverse needs of students, EDB has provided respective types of special schools with additional teachers on establishment. The actual teacher-to-student ratio for special schools in 2018/19 was between 1:2.5 and 1:5.4 (see Appendix A). In 2018/19, the establishment of teaching staff was 1,945 staff;
 - (ii) **Specialist staff.** Specialist staff in special schools include occupational therapists (OTs), occupational therapy assistants, physiotherapists (PTs), nurses, braille staff, social workers, educational psychologists and speech therapists. For special schools with a boarding section, the specialist staff provided also include wardens, nurses, houseparents and programme workers. In 2018/19, the establishment of specialist staff was 1,181 staff; and

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- (iii) ***Non-specialist staff.*** Non-specialist staff in special schools include clerks, clerical assistants, artisans, drivers, workshop attendants, janitor staff and teacher assistants. For special schools with a boarding section, the non-specialist staff provided also include cooks and watchmen. In 2018/19, the establishment of non-specialist staff was 792 staff;

- (b) ***Professional development.*** To enhance the professional capacity of the staff of special schools in catering for their students, EDB offers professional development programmes and training courses for both teaching and non-teaching staff. For example, EDB has been providing a 240-hour training course specifically for special school teachers. Moreover, EDB has commissioned tertiary institutions and medical organisations to conduct training for special school personnel to equip them with knowledge and skills in handling children with medical complexity; and

- (c) ***Grants and support.*** In addition to the manpower resources provided in accordance with the Code of Aid for Special Schools or Code of Aid for Aided Schools, special schools are also provided with different grants. Schools may deploy some of the grants flexibly to employ additional staff or to hire professional services to meet the operational needs of individual schools. Furthermore, EDB provides various support to schools. For example, EDB provides network support for special schools in the form of learning circles. EDB professional officers also conduct theme-based visits to special schools every year to identify good practices for dissemination to other special schools.

Table 4

**Total amount of financial provision for EDB and expenditure
on the Special Education programme area
(financial year 2014-15 to 2018-19)**

Financial year	Total amount of financial provision for EDB (\$ million)	Expenditure on the Special Education programme area (\$ million)
2014-15	47,975.8	2,010.8
2015-16	52,286.5	2,190.0
2016-17	54,815.4	2,292.9
2017-18	60,087.8	2,463.1
2018-19	67,640.3	2,712.7
Change between 2014-15 and 2018-19	+19,664.5 (+41%)	+701.9 (+35%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

1.10 The Special Education Division of EDB, headed by a Principal Assistant Secretary, is responsible for services related to support for students with SEN in both ordinary and special schools. Under the Special Education Division, there are two Special Education Support Sections which are responsible for special education services (Note 7). As at 30 June 2019, the establishment and staff strength of the two Sections were 35 and 32 respectively. An organisation chart (extract) (as at 30 June 2019) of the Special Education Division is shown at Appendix B.

Note 7: *Apart from these two Special Education Support Sections, the Special Education Division has another two Special Education Support Sections responsible for the implementation of integrated education, five Educational Psychology Service Sections, a Speech and Hearing Services Section, and an Administration Section.*

Introduction

Audit review

1.11 The Audit Commission (Audit) completed a review of services for students with SEN in 1999, and a review of EDB's work in the implementation of integrated education in 2018. The results were reported in Chapter 7 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 33 of October 1999 and in Chapter 3 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 70 of April 2018 respectively.

1.12 In April 2019, Audit commenced a review of EDB's work in the implementation of special education and SWD's work in connection with special education. The audit has focused on the following areas:

- (a) provision and management of school places and boarding places (PART 2);
- (b) staffing of special schools (PART 3); and
- (c) grants and support for special education (PART 4).

Audit has found room for improvement in the above areas and has made a number of recommendations to address the issues.

General response from the Government

1.13 The Secretary for Education and the Director of Social Welfare agree with the audit recommendations. The Secretary for Education has said that the Audit Report will serve as a valuable reference for EDB's continual enhancement of the quality of special education in Hong Kong.

Acknowledgement

1.14 Audit would like to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation of the staff of EDB and SWD during the course of the audit review.

PART 2: PROVISION AND MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL PLACES AND BOARDING PLACES

2.1 This PART examines the provision and management of school places and boarding places of special schools. Audit found room for improvement in the following areas:

- (a) provision and management of school places (paras. 2.2 to 2.15); and
- (b) provision and management of boarding places (paras. 2.16 to 2.36).

Provision and management of school places

Provision of special school places

2.2 Except for the Hospital School (see para. 1.4(f)), EDB provides school places for the remaining 59 special schools either on a regional basis or on a territory-wide basis:

- (a) ***Regional basis.*** School places for 48 special schools (i.e. the 7 schools for children with PD and the 41 schools for children with ID) are provided on a regional basis, namely:
 - (i) Hong Kong Island;
 - (ii) Kowloon and Tseung Kwan O;
 - (iii) Sha Tin and Sai Kung (Note 8);
 - (iv) Tai Po and North;

Note 8: *According to EDB's definition, the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region does not include Tseung Kwan O.*

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

- (v) Kwai Tsing and Tsuen Wan;
 - (vi) Tuen Mun and Yuen Long; and
 - (vii) Outlying Islands (Note 9); and
- (b) ***Territory-wide basis.*** For 11 special schools (i.e. the two schools for children with VI, the school for children with HI and the eight SSDs (Note 10)), school places are provided on a territory-wide basis.

Not all regions provided with all types of special school places

2.3 Audit reviewed the school places that were provided on a regional basis (i.e. the 7 schools for children with PD and the 41 schools for children with ID) and found that:

- (a) the Outlying Islands region did not have schools for children with PD and children with ID (including MiID, MoID or SID). In 2018/19, the 138 children with PD or ID residing in the region were placed to the special schools in the other six regions; and
- (b) the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region did not have schools for children with SID. In 2018/19, the 92 children with SID residing in the region were placed to the special schools in the Kowloon and Tseung Kwan O region, the Kwai Tsing and Tsuen Wan region, and the Tai Po and North region (see Table 5).

Note 9: *The Outlying Islands region consists of the islands spreading across the water south and southwest of Hong Kong Island. Examples of islands include the Lantau Island, Lamma Island, Cheung Chau and Peng Chau.*

Note 10: *According to EDB, planning of provision of SSD places is done on a territory-wide basis having regard to: (a) the need for segregating SSD students from their undesirable peers by taking them temporarily away from their neighbourhood; (b) the transient nature of students' difficulties; and (c) the relatively high turnover of students and hence the ever-changing profile of their residential area distribution.*

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

Table 5

**Availability of schools for children with PD
and schools for children with ID analysed by region
(2018/19)**

Region	Schools for children with			
	PD	MiID	MoID	SID
Hong Kong Island	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kowloon and Tseung Kwan O	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sha Tin and Sai Kung	✓	✓	✓	✗
Tai Po and North	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kwai Tsing and Tsuen Wan	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tuen Mun and Yuen Long	✓	✓	✓	✓
Outlying Islands	✗	✗	✗	✗

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

2.4 Audit noted that as at July 2019:

- (a) a new school for children with ID (MiID, MoID and SID) in Tung Chung (i.e. the Outlying Islands region) was under development and was expected to commence operation in 2020/21 (Note 11). In view of the long time taken to provide school places in Tung Chung, Audit considers that EDB needs to closely monitor the development of the school and ensure that it can commence operation in accordance with the planned timetable; and

Note 11: *The Government conceived the plan to build a special school in a site in Tung Chung in 2004. After completing preparations such as technical feasibility study and school design, EDB launched a consultation in 2008. However, EDB met with strong opposition from some local residents over concerns about noise and traffic implications etc. Failing to reach a consensus with the residents, EDB decided to identify an alternative site in Tung Chung. Following discussion between EDB and relevant government departments, in March 2013, the current site was reserved for EDB to build the special school.*

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

- (b) EDB had no plan to provide school places for children with PD in the Outlying Islands region and for children with SID in the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region. In response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit in September 2019 that planning and establishing every type of special schools in every region was not the policy intention of EDB owing to the small number of students requiring special school placement. In Audit's view, EDB needs to consider expanding the scope of target students of special schools as far as practicable so that children with PD in the Outlying Islands region and children with SID in the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region can be better catered for in their own regions. For instance, EDB can explore with schools for children with MiID and schools for children with MoID in the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region the feasibility of these schools to accept children with SID.

Need to take measures to address the under-enrolment in some schools

2.5 Audit examined the enrolment rate of students in special schools and found that the enrolment rates of SSDs, schools for children with VI and the school for children with HI were not high in 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19 (see Table 6):

- (a) ***SSDs.*** The overall enrolment rates of the eight SSDs were 51%, 53% and 57% respectively;
- (b) ***Schools for children with VI.*** The overall enrolment rates of the two schools for children with VI were 72%, 66% and 66% respectively; and
- (c) ***School for children with HI.*** The enrolment rates of the school for children with HI were 68%, 70% and 58% respectively.

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

Table 6

Enrolment rates of students in special schools (2016/17 to 2018/19)

Student type	Overall enrolment rate		
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Students with MiID	95%	96%	96%
Students with MoID	93%	95%	95%
Students with SID	88%	88%	88%
Students with PD	87%	86%	88%
Students in Hospital School	100%	95%	84%
Students with VI	72%	66%	66%
Students with HI	68%	70%	58%
Students in SSDs	51%	53%	57%

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

2.6 Regarding the enrolment rates of the two schools for children with VI and the school for children with HI, EDB informed Audit in September 2019 that they had all along been offering support services to students with VI and students with HI studying in ordinary schools and/or other special schools through the Resource Support Programme and Enhanced Support Service respectively. In view of the development of integrated education, it was anticipated that the enrolment of the schools could not be boosted.

2.7 Audit analysed the enrolment rates of each of the eight SSDs and found that in 2018/19, the rates ranged from 40% to 74% (see Table 7).

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

Table 7

**Enrolment rates of the eight SSDs
(2016/17 to 2018/19)**

SSD	Enrolment rate		
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
A	56%	66%	73%
B	54%	64%	64%
C	33%	37%	41%
D	54%	59%	64%
E	54%	77%	74%
F	53%	49%	44%
G	51%	36%	40%
H (Note)	Not applicable	27%	52%

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: SSD H commenced operation in September 2017.

2.8 A persistent and significant under-enrolment is not satisfactory and suggests that there is a need to explore ways to better utilise the resources of SSDs. Audit considers that EDB needs to ascertain the reasons for the low enrolment of students in SSDs and take measures to address the issue, for example by expanding the scope of services provided by SSDs, where appropriate.

Admission to special schools

2.9 The prevailing referral and placement mechanism of students to special schools for upcoming Primary One students and for school-age students (i.e. students other than upcoming Primary One students) is as follows:

- (a) ***Upcoming Primary One students.*** Upon receipt of the referrals (Note 12), EDB will confirm the types of special schools recommended by the professionals and discuss with parents about the educational needs of their children and the selection of schools. The placement arrangements of the schools for children with ID, PD, VI and HI (Note 13) are as follows:
- (i) ***Schools for children with ID.*** In 2018/19, the numbers of schools for children with MiID, MoID, MiID and MoID, and SID were 12, 14, 5, and 10 respectively. Each school has its own Primary Catchment Area (i.e. covering areas that are in the vicinity of the school). For schools for children with MiID and MoID, the catchment areas are different for the MiID section and the MoID section. Apart from the Primary Catchment Area, EDB has divided Hong Kong into five Extended Catchment Areas (Note 14). The parents of a child can choose any school in the territory. While the parents are recommended to apply for a school whose Primary

Note 12: *In general, pre-school children are assessed by the Child Assessment Centres under the Child Assessment Service of the Department of Health or the Hospital Authority. With parental consent, the Child Assessment Centres will send the reports of the children who are recommended to study in special schools to EDB within one school year before they reach the age appropriate for admission to Primary One. If the children are assessed by other qualified professionals arranged by parents, relevant reports should also reach EDB within the same time limit.*

Note 13: *There are no admissions of upcoming Primary One students for SSDs and the Hospital School. The reasons are: (a) for SSDs, ordinary schools will render school-based support to their Primary One students with emotional or behavioural problems using the additional resources and professional support provided by EDB. They can refer students who need more support to the Adjustment Unit run by EDB for additional off-site intervention; and (b) for the Hospital School, students are referred to the School directly by the hospitals.*

Note 14: *The five Extended Catchment Areas are: (a) Hong Kong Island and Outlying Islands (excluding Tung Chung); (b) Kowloon, Tseung Kwan O and Sai Kung East; (c) New Territories East and Sai Kung West; (d) Tsuen Wan, Kwai Chung, Tsing Yi and Tung Chung; and (e) Tuen Mun and Yuen Long.*

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

Catchment Area covers their residence so as to reduce the time spent on travelling to and from school, they are allowed to apply for a school in the Extended Catchment Area to which their residence belongs instead. Parents may also apply for a school across districts (i.e. any school in Hong Kong). Applications for schools within the Primary Catchment Area will be handled first, followed by the applications for schools within the Extended Catchment Area and then applications for schools across districts. If the demand for school places of a particular school exceeds the supply, EDB will assign school places to applicants by drawing lots. For each school, at least one Primary One school place is reserved for each category of applications (i.e. Primary Catchment Area, Extended Catchment Area and across districts);

(ii) ***Schools for children with PD.*** In 2018/19, there were seven schools for children with PD. Each school has its own catchment area for admitting children living in the area. The schools' catchment areas cover the whole territory. Considering the accessibility to schools, the parents of a child can only apply for a school whose catchment area covers their residence. According to EDB's internal guidelines, parents may discuss with EDB if a school whose catchment area does not cover their residence is preferred due to exceptional circumstances; and

(iii) ***Schools for children with VI and the school for children with HI.*** In 2018/19, there were two schools for children with VI and one school for children with HI. One school for children with VI admits children with VI and the other admits children with VI cum ID. The three schools admit children across the territory; and

(b) ***School-age students.*** School-age students can apply for special school placement at any time throughout the school year. The placement arrangements of SSDs, schools for children with ID, schools for children with PD, schools for children with VI and the school for children with HI (Note 15) are as follows:

Note 15: *Students are referred to the Hospital School directly by the hospitals.*

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

- (i) **SSDs.** Upon their parents' consent, students are referred by their schools to the Vetting Committee of CCRM (see para. 1.4(e)). After vetting, the student information is passed to SSDs to proceed with the admission procedures; and
- (ii) **Schools for children with ID/PD/VI/HI.** Children are referred to the appropriate type of special schools based on the assessment conducted by relevant professionals including types of disabilities and recommendations. EDB will provide information on schools which have vacancies to the parents for them to choose a school for their children.

Need to adopt more flexibility in placement arrangements for school-age students with ID and students with PD

2.10 The placement arrangements for school-age students with ID and students with PD are more restrictive:

- (a) ***Placement arrangements for school-age students with ID versus upcoming Primary One students with ID.*** Upcoming Primary One students with ID (i.e. MiID, MoID or SID) can apply for any school in the territory. However, school-age students with ID can only apply for a school whose Primary Catchment Area or Extended Catchment Area covers their residence. In contrast, both upcoming Primary One students with PD and school-age students with PD are subject to the same application restriction that they can only apply for a school whose catchment area covers their residence; and
- (b) ***Placement arrangements for students with PD versus upcoming Primary One students with SID.*** Unlike the placement arrangements for upcoming Primary One students with SID which allow applications for any school in the territory, students with PD can only apply for a school whose catchment area covers their residence. However, for the provision of boarding places, EDB considers that both students with SID and students with PD have mobility problems and therefore, parents of students with SID or PD are subject to the same application restriction (i.e. they can only apply for boarding places in a school whose catchment area covers their residence) (see para. 2.30(b)(ii)).

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

In response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit in September 2019 that in reality, only few parents of students with SID will choose a school outside the Primary Catchment Area or Extended Catchment Area unless they have to apply for boarding services. For students with PD, owing to the mobility constraints similar to students with SID, their parents will choose schools near to their residence unless boarding services are required. Parents of students with PD may discuss with the officers of EDB during interviews if a school in other districts is required due to special circumstances. To give parents more choices with a view to better catering for the diverse needs of the students, Audit considers that EDB needs to consider adopting more flexibility in the placement arrangements for school-age students with ID and students with PD.

Need to review reasons for prolonged enrolment of SSD students

2.11 SSDs aim to provide intensive support for students with moderate to severe emotional and behavioural difficulties to help them tide over their transient adaptation problems in the course of development, and to enhance their learning motivation and life skills so that they can resume education in ordinary schools as soon as possible. If the students show marked improvement after receiving intensive support in SSDs, arrangements will be made for the students to reintegrate into ordinary schools.

2.12 ***Discharge arrangements.*** The discharge arrangements of SSDs are as follows:

- (a) ***Students under short-term adjustment programme.*** Students may opt for the short-term adjustment programme if they are suitable for placement in SSDs but are unwilling to be discharged from their original schools or whose problems are expected to be improved shortly after receiving the services at SSDs. The short-term adjustment programme is implemented for students who are expected to be able to be discharged after receiving services at SSDs for three months to one year. SSDs are required to review the progress of students every three months so as to collaborate with students' original schools and facilitate the students to return to their original schools (Note 16) as early as possible; and

Note 16: *Students under the short-term adjustment programme maintain their registration with their original schools and will be reintegrated into the schools on completion of the programme with satisfactory improvement in behaviour.*

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

- (b) *Students not under short-term adjustment programme.* According to EDB, most students are expected to be able to achieve notable improvement and leave SSDs within two school years. When a student has stayed for about one and a half years, SSDs are required to conduct a comprehensive review of the student's progress to help the student return to ordinary school and/or reintegrate into the community as early as possible.

2.13 Audit analysed the periods of stay in SSDs (between admission and discharge) for discharged students in the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18 (see Table 8) and found the following issues:

- (a) *Students under short-term adjustment programme.* While the short-term adjustment programme is meant for students who are expected to be able to achieve improvement for discharge in three months to one year's time, on average 41% of the students (ranging from 27% to 52%) under the short-term adjustment programme stayed in the schools for more than one year, and the longest period of stay (for one student discharged in 2013/14) was 3 years and 8 months; and
- (b) *Students not under short-term adjustment programme.* On average 46% of the students (ranging from 34% to 58%) not under the short-term adjustment programme stayed in the schools for more than two years, and the longest period of stay (for one student discharged in 2015/16) was 7 years.

According to EDB's policy and objectives, SSDs aim to provide more intensive guidance to students so that they may reintegrate into ordinary schools as soon as possible. SSDs are required by EDB to review the performance of students and make professional assessment to identify students who could reintegrate. Nevertheless, a notable percentage of students had to receive intensive support provided by SSDs for a considerable period of time (i.e. beyond three months to one year for students under the short-term adjustment programme and more than two years for students not under the short-term adjustment programme). EDB needs to review the reasons why more than 40% of students, on average, stayed in SSDs beyond the expected timeframe and take appropriate improvement measures. In particular, EDB needs to ascertain whether more guidance and advice should be given to referrers of SSDs so that they can better identify students suitable for the short-term adjustment programme, which can better meet their needs.

Provision and management of school places and boarding places

Table 8

Periods of stay in SSDs for students discharged from SSDs between 2013/14 and 2017/18

Period of stay (Month)	No. of students				
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
<i>Students under short-term adjustment programme</i>					
≤ 6	4	6	2	7	11
> 6 to 12	45	26	36	37	85
> 12 to 18	22	15	28	23	25
> 18 to 24	3	5	12	11	9
> 24 to 30	2	1	1	2	1
	31 (39%)	21 (40%)	41 (52%)	37 (46%)	35 (27%)
> 30 to 36	2	0	0	1	0
> 36 to 48	2	0	0	0	0
Total	80	53	79	81	131
<i>Students not under short-term adjustment programme</i>					
≤ 6	26	11	11	7	15
> 6 to 12	52	38	26	20	26
> 12 to 18	60	54	42	34	30
> 18 to 24	69	49	44	34	31
> 24 to 30	34	24	26	24	16
> 30 to 36	23	36	25	28	29
> 36 to 48	24	37	32	36	27
	109 (34%)	125 (45%)	111 (47%)	129 (58%)	90 (47%)
> 48 to 60	13	17	15	22	13
> 60 to 72	15	11	12	15	4
> 72 to 84	0	0	1	4	1
Total	316	277	234	224	192

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Audit recommendations

- 2.14 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**
- (a) **closely monitor the development of the new school for children with ID in Tung Chung and ensure that it can commence operation in accordance with the planned timetable;**
 - (b) **consider expanding the scope of target students of special schools as far as practicable so that children with PD in the Outlying Islands region and children with SID in the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region can be better catered for in their own regions;**
 - (c) **ascertain the reasons for the low enrolment of students in SSDs and take measures to address the issue, for example by expanding the scope of services provided by SSDs, where appropriate;**
 - (d) **consider adopting more flexibility in the placement arrangements for school-age students with ID and students with PD;**
 - (e) **review the reasons why more than 40% of students, on average, stayed in SSDs beyond the expected timeframe and take appropriate improvement measures; and**
 - (f) **ascertain whether more guidance and advice should be given to referrers of SSDs so that they can better identify students suitable for the short-term adjustment programme, which can better meet their needs.**

Response from the Government

2.15 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) EDB is liaising with the Architectural Services Department closely. The new school for children with ID in Tung Chung is expected to be handed

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over to the School Sponsoring Body within 2019. EDB is actively exploring the feasibility of operating the new school within 2019/20;

- (b) from the perspective of provision, the new school in Tung Chung is provided with facilities required to cater for the students with SID, which are similar to those for students with PD. If deemed necessary, students with PD residing in the Outlying Islands region could also be admitted to the school. As for the students with SID living in the Sha Tin and Sai Kung region, currently, they could be referred to related special schools located in the Kowloon and Tseung Kwan O region and/or the Tai Po and North region. EDB will explore the recommendation of expanding the scope of target students of special schools as far as practicable;
- (c) EDB will keep in view the enrolment situation in SSDs. In parallel, in order to maximise the capacity and expertise of SSDs, a 2-year pilot scheme of special units has been trying out in SSDs starting from 2019/20 to 2020/21 to provide intensive support for students with autism spectrum disorders in ordinary schools who display very severe adjustment problems. EDB will evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot scheme and collect views of the key stakeholders before considering expansion of the scope of the services provided by the SSDs along this line. At the same time, EDB will discuss with the SSD(s) with very low enrolment on the feasibility of their conversion to other types of special schools that have higher demand;
- (d) EDB will consider providing more options of special schools for the school-age students with ID and students with PD subject to their genuine needs;
- (e) EDB notes that there are a number of reasons whereby students require long time studying in SSD, such as the need for completion of senior secondary education, poor family support and awaiting alternative placement, etc. EDB will continue to monitor the reasons for the prolonged stay of some students in SSDs and will continue to work towards the objective of their timely return to ordinary school once they are ready; and
- (f) EDB will continue to provide and update information of SSDs through arranging seminars and issuing guidelines for the referrers to facilitate them to make appropriate decision of the suitable programme in SSD for their cases.

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2.16 EDB encourages students to live with their families so as to allow students to grow up in a normal family environment and maintain good parent-child relationship. EDB will only arrange boarding placement for students in need. The objective of providing boarding services in special schools is to cater for the long-term residential needs of students with severe disabilities and to facilitate them to receive school education during school days. In 2018/19, boarding services were provided in 28 of the 60 special schools. Of the 28 schools, 7 were SSDs and their residential homes were subvented by and under the purview of SWD. The boarding sections of the remaining 21 schools were subvented by and under the purview of EDB (see Table 1 in para. 1.4). Usually, students using the boarding services of a school also study at the school (Note 17). EDB conducts vetting of applications for boarding services of the 21 special schools other than SSDs. For the seven SSDs, both EDB and SWD conduct vetting of boarding service applications through CCRM (see para. 1.4(e)). The eligibility criteria for boarding services of schools are as follows:

- (a) ***Boarding services of SSDs.*** In addition to meeting the requirements for day placement at SSDs, students with the following conditions may have the need for boarding service:
 - (i) inadequate family care, rejection by parents or suspected child abuse; or
 - (ii) having deep involvement in gang activities and failing to disentangle oneself from adverse influence of the subculture unless intensive life skill training and supervised daily care are provided; and

Note 17: *As at 15 September 2018, of the 1,460 students using the boarding services, there were 35 boarders of two schools for children with PD who were not studying at the schools. The boarding sections of the two schools have special admission arrangement. The two schools are run by two different school sponsoring bodies. The boarding section of each of the two schools not only admits its own students, but also students of another special school (which does not have a boarding section) run by its respective school sponsoring body.*

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- (b) ***Boarding services of schools other than SSDs.*** In addition to meeting the requirements for day placement at special schools, applicants have to meet at least one of the following criteria:
- (i) homelessness (e.g. orphans);
 - (ii) severely inadequate care and supervision from adults;
 - (iii) very disturbed family relationship;
 - (iv) evidence of being abused; or
 - (v) residence is too remote from the special school and transportation between home and school is inconvenient.

2.17 Boarding services can be classified into two types:

- (a) ***Five-day boarding service.*** Students can only stay in the schools on school days. Students have to return home during Saturdays, Sundays and school holidays; and
- (b) ***Seven-day boarding service.*** Students can stay in the schools all year round, including non-school days.

Enrolment of boarding places

2.18 As at 15 September 2018, the capacity and the enrolment of boarding places were 1,141 and 998 respectively for the boarding places under the purview of EDB, and 727 and 462 respectively for the boarding places under the purview of SWD in SSDs (see Table 9). Table 10 analyses the enrolment situation.

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Table 9

**Capacity and enrolment of boarding places
(15 September 2018)**

	Type of special school							Overall
	Boarding places under purview of EDB						Boarding places under purview of SWD	
	SID	MoID	PD	VI	HI	Overall	SSD	
Capacity (a)	409	343	276	107	6	1,141	727	1,868
Enrolment (b)	353	329	242	72	2	998	462	1,460
Percentage (c) = (b) ÷ (a) × 100%	86%	96%	88%	67%	33%	87%	64%	78%

Source: Audit analysis of EDB and SWD records

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Table 10

Analysis of enrolment situation for boarding places (15 September 2018)

	Type of special school						Boarding places under purview of SWD	Total
	Boarding places under purview of EDB							
	SID	MoID	PD	VI	HI	Sub-total	SSD	
Five-day boarding places								
Capacity (a)	179	166	76	70	0	491	0	491
Enrolment (b)	132	158	60	49	0	399	0	399
No. of students with boarding places already made available (Note 1) (c)	7	2	3	0	0	12	0	12
No. of vacant places (Note 2) (d)=(a)-(b)-(c)	40	6	13	21	0	80	0	80
No. of students awaiting boarding places (Note 2)	1	34	0	0	0	35	0	35
Seven-day boarding places								
Capacity (e)	230	177	200	37	6	650	727	1,377
Enrolment (f)	221	171	182	23	2	599	462	1,061
No. of students with boarding places already made available (Note 1) (g)	8	3	8	1	2	22	30	52
No. of vacant places (Note 2) (h)=(e)-(f)-(g)	1	3	10	13	2	29	235	264
No. of students awaiting boarding places (Note 2)	26	105	8	0	0	139	8	147

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB and SWD records*

Note 1: *Students with boarding places already made available included those undergoing admission procedures and those who had been allocated boarding places but whose admissions were deferred due to personal reasons.*

Note 2: *Vacant places and students awaiting boarding places existed at the same time due to reasons such as: (a) mismatch of students' gender and the gender of students for which vacant places were available; (b) mismatch of parents' school preference and the schools in which vacant places were available; and (c) awaiting parents' consent for boarding placement.*

Need to explore ways to rationalise boarding places for students with SID

2.19 Audit analysed the vacancy and waiting situation of boarding places in schools for children with SID and noted that as at 15 September 2018:

- (a) notwithstanding that there were 26 students waiting for seven-day boarding service, there were 40 vacant places for five-day boarding service; and
- (b) under the existing mechanism, applicants could only apply for either five-day boarding places or seven-day boarding places. Applicants awaiting seven-day boarding places would not be allocated five-day boarding places as a stopgap measure to partially meet their boarding needs before seven-day boarding places were available for them.

2.20 Audit considers that EDB needs to explore the feasibility of implementing measures with a view to making more efficient use of the boarding places and shortening the waiting time for seven-day boarding places, such as:

- (a) converting some vacant five-day boarding places to seven-day boarding places; and
- (b) allowing students waiting for seven-day boarding places to use vacant five-day boarding places temporarily before seven-day boarding places are available.

Shortfall of boarding places for students with MoID

2.21 As at 15 June 2019, there were 132 students with MoID waiting for boarding places (28 for five-day boarding service and 104 for seven-day boarding service). Audit analysed the number of students with MoID awaiting boarding services from 2014/15 to 2018/19 (see Figure 1). Audit found that:

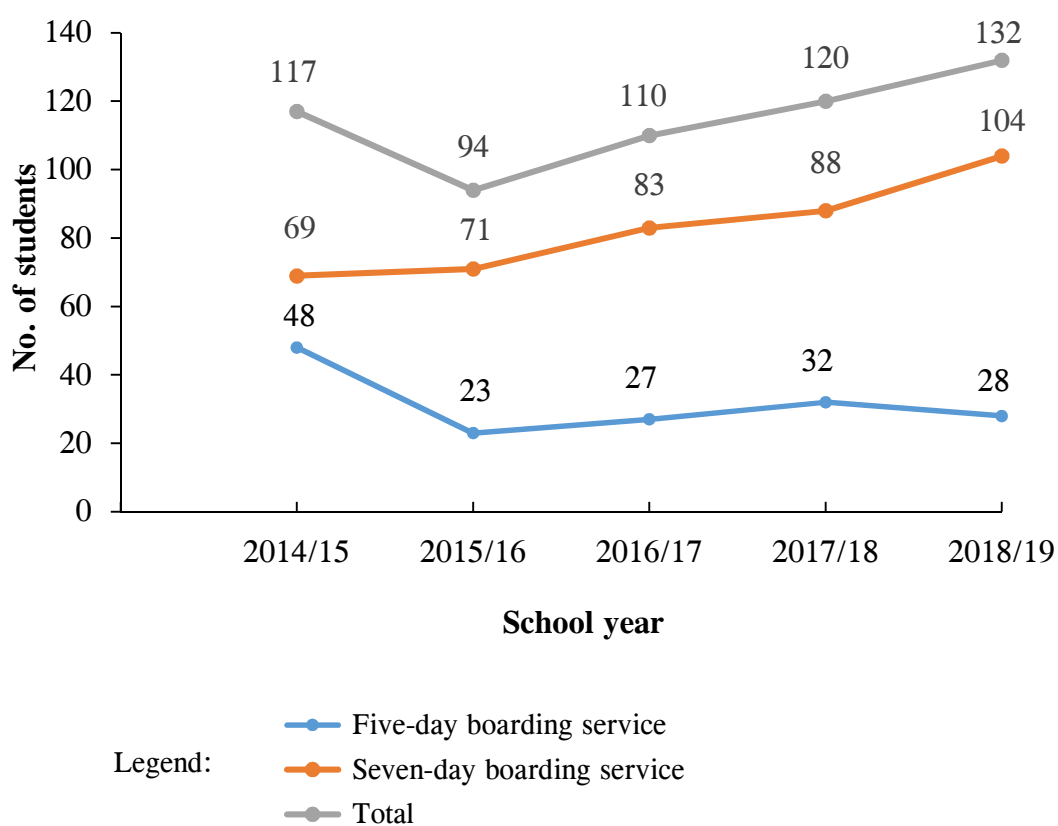
- (a) the overall number of students awaiting boarding services increased from 117 as at 15 September 2014 to 132 as at 15 June 2019; and

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- (b) the number of students awaiting seven-day boarding service had been on an increasing trend from 69 as at 15 September 2014 to 104 as at 15 June 2019, while the corresponding number for five-day boarding service decreased from 48 as at 15 September 2014 to 28 as at 15 June 2019.

Figure 1

**Number of students with MoID awaiting boarding services
(2014/15 to 2018/19)**



Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Remarks: Except for 2018/19, the numbers of students awaiting boarding services in this Figure were the numbers as at 15 September of the respective school years. For 2018/19, the numbers were updated to 15 June 2019.

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2.22 Audit conducted an ageing analysis on the waiting time of students with MoID for boarding services as at 15 June 2019 (see Table 11). Audit noted that:

- (a) 8 (29%) of the 28 students awaiting five-day boarding service had been waiting for more than 1 year, and the longest waiting time was 5 years and 10 months; and
- (b) 65 (63%) of the 104 students awaiting seven-day boarding service had been waiting for more than 1 year, and the longest waiting time was 3 years and 9 months.

Table 11

**Ageing analysis of waiting time of students
with MoID for boarding services
(15 June 2019)**

Waiting time (Year)	No. of students awaiting	
	Five-day boarding service	Seven-day boarding service
≤1	20	39
>1 to 2	0	34
>2 to 3	1	25
>3 to 4	0	6
>4 to 6	7 (Note)	0
Total	28	104

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: According to EDB, in May 2018, it approached the parents of 4 female students who had been waiting for five-day boarding service of two special schools on Hong Kong Island for 3 to 4 years. EDB offered a special arrangement of placing them into the boarding section of a special school in Kowloon, but the parents refused the offer and chose to continue waiting.

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2.23 In response to the long waiting time for boarding service for students with MoID, EDB informed Audit in October 2019 that in addition to the reasons of parents' requests for deferment of admission, admission to the boarding section of a specific school and students' long-term stay in hospital which have lengthened the waiting time, the increase in family problems of inadequate and/or improper care for children is a major factor which has induced the high demand for boarding service, especially seven-day boarding service, in schools for children with MoID in the recent years.

2.24 EDB has been working to increase the boarding places for students with MoID. Audit noted that several works programmes to provide new boarding places were in the pipeline:

- (a) conversion programme at the existing boarding section of a school for children with MoID in Sha Tin to provide 12 new boarding places. The new boarding places were expected to be available in 2020/21;
- (b) construction of a new school for children with ID (MiID, MoID and SID) in Tung Chung with a boarding section of around 40 new boarding places for students with MoID (Note 18). The new school and its boarding section were expected to commence operation in 2020/21;
- (c) construction of new boarding sections for a school for children with MoID in Tai Po and a school for children with MiID and MoID in Fanling providing 60 new boarding places for students with MoID in each school. The new boarding sections were expected to commence operation in 2021/22; and
- (d) planning of a new school for children with MiID and MoID in Kowloon Tong with a boarding section of 80 new boarding places for students with MoID. The new school and its boarding section were expected to commence operation in 2025/26.

2.25 *Need to further increase the supply of new boarding places.* Audit noted that, according to EDB's latest projection on the supply and demand of boarding places for students with MoID:

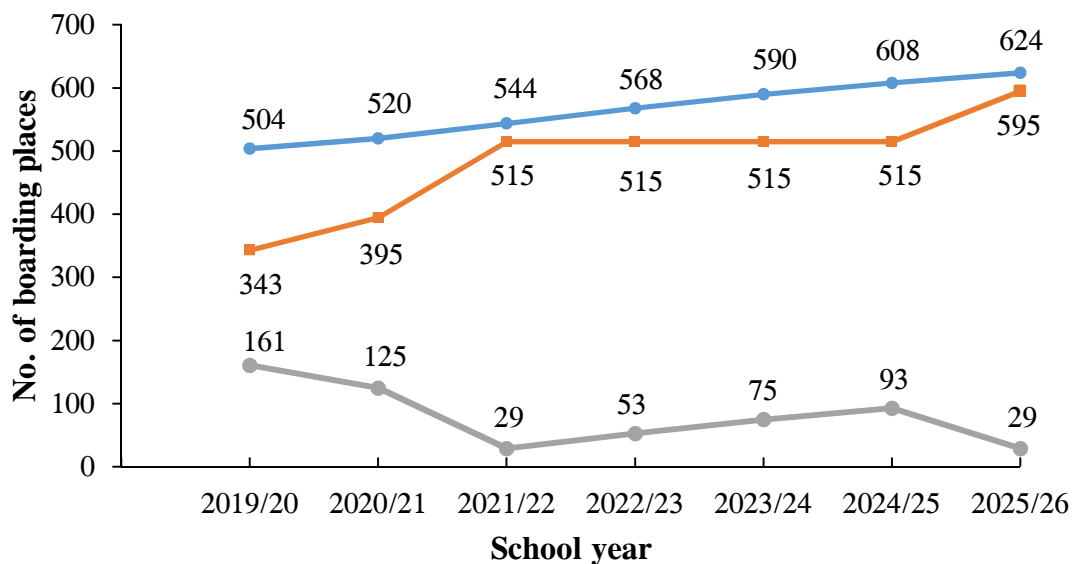
Note 18: *Apart from boarding places for students with MoID, the boarding section will also provide around 20 places for students with SID.*

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- (a) a significant level of shortfall of boarding places would persist in 2019/20 and 2020/21. The projected numbers of shortfall of boarding places were 161 places in 2019/20 and 125 places in 2020/21; and
- (b) notwithstanding that the shortfall of boarding places would improve from 161 places in 2019/20 to 29 places in 2025/26, there would still be a shortfall of boarding places throughout the projection period of seven school years (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Projected shortfall of boarding places for students with MoID (2019/20 to 2025/26)



Legend: —●— Demand
—■— Supply
—●— Shortfall

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

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According to EDB, it has been exploring feasible ways to increase the supply with reference to the actual demand of the boarding places. EDB has made use of the space available in the boarding sections of schools for children with MoID for provision of additional boarding places in recent years. Audit considers that EDB needs to step up its efforts in exploring effective measures to increase the supply of new boarding places with a view to shortening the waiting time of students with MoID for boarding services.

Need to explore ways to make good use of boarding places in SSDs

2.26 Each SSD and its residential home only admit students of a single gender. Of the seven SSDs with a residential home, four admit boys and three admit girls. Audit examined the utilisation of boarding places in SSDs analysed by gender in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19. Audit found that:

- (a) the utilisation of boarding places for boys increased from 76% in 2014/15 to 82% in 2018/19, and the corresponding figures for girls decreased from 73% in 2014/15 to 43% in 2018/19 (see Table 12); and
- (b) the numbers of vacant boarding places for boys decreased from 109 in 2014/15 to 82 in 2018/19, and the corresponding figures for girls increased from 55 in 2014/15 to 153 in 2018/19 (see Figure 3).

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Table 12

Utilisation of boarding places in SSDs analysed by gender (2014/15 to 2018/19)

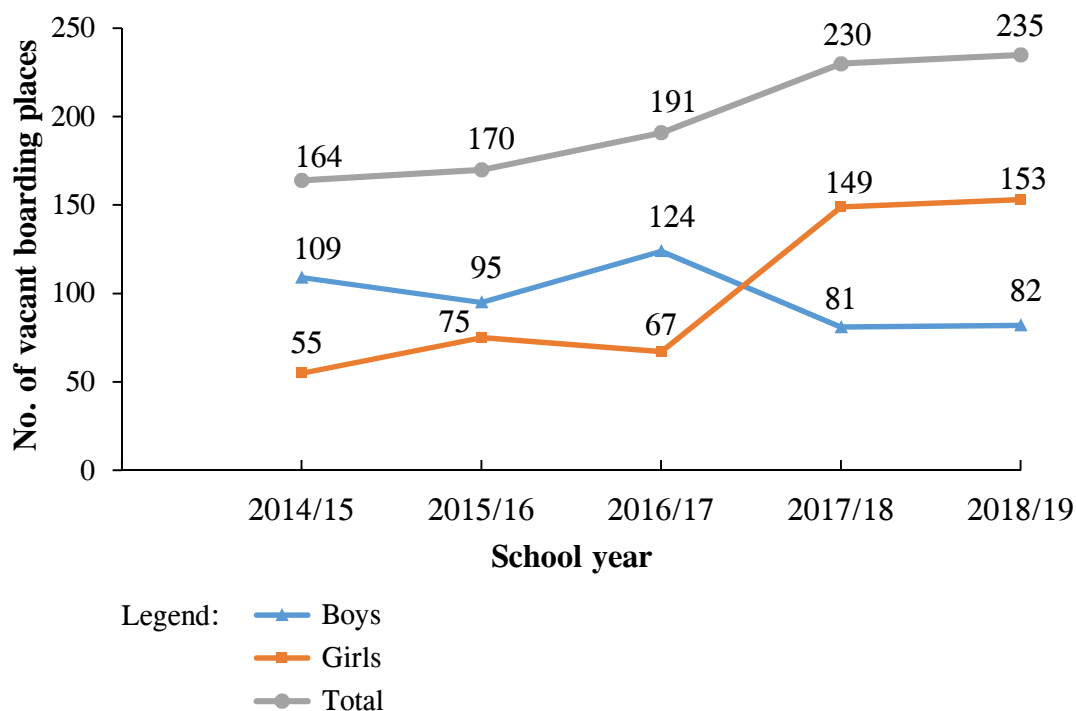
School year	Utilisation of boarding places in SSDs		
	Boys	Girls	Overall
2014/15	76%	73%	75%
2015/16	79%	63%	74%
2016/17	73%	67%	71%
2017/18	82%	45%	68%
2018/19	82%	43%	68%

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB and SWD records*

Remarks: *Utilisation is calculated by dividing the sum of enrolment and the number of students with boarding places already made available to them by the capacity.*

Figure 3

Number of vacant boarding places in SSDs analysed by gender (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Audit analysis of EDB and SWD records

2.27 Audit noted that in view of the decline in the utilisation of boarding places in SSDs for girls, a SSD for girls redeployed 32 of its boarding places to serve an extended service target starting from 1 January 2019 (Note 19). To optimise the use of boarding places, SWD needs to keep in view the utilisation of boarding places in residential homes of SSDs and continue to take measures to make good use of the vacant boarding places where appropriate.

Note 19: Starting from 1 January 2019, a total of 32 boarding places of a SSD for girls have been redeployed to serve an extended service target, i.e. girls aged 12 to 21 with moderate to serious emotional and behavioural problems, and either studying in the community or working. This measure was initiated by SWD and the service operator in consultation with EDB.

Need to provide assistance to special schools in reviewing the boarding needs of existing boarders

2.28 Applications for boarding placement in special schools other than SSDs are processed by EDB instead of by individual special schools. According to EDB:

- (a) as the provision of boarding services is planned on a territory-wide basis, processing the applications by EDB would better utilise the boarding places to ensure that:
 - (i) all students admitted meet the boarding placement criteria (see para. 2.16(b));
 - (ii) the admission criteria are applied consistently; and
 - (iii) the actual supply and demand situation is timely updated for better co-ordination; and
- (b) to make more cost-effective use of the boarding places, EDB would review the boarding needs of the existing boarders at regular time interval. If their family situations had improved, their boarding places would be made available for other students with the most genuine needs.

2.29 EDB entrusted the special schools to ensure that boarding places were released by students who no longer have boarding needs, making such boarding places available for students with the most genuine needs. EDB has reminded special schools through different means (such as in the annual meetings with principals of special schools and when EDB referred students to special schools for boarding services) to conduct regular reviews of the boarding needs of their boarders. In July 2019, in response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit that:

- (a) special schools had developed their own school-based guidelines for conducting regular reviews of boarding needs of existing boarders. However, the schools expressed difficulties in conducting the reviews because the schools had difficulties verifying the family problems and situations of existing boarders, which changed from time to time; and

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- (b) special schools were required to report to EDB the waiting situation of their boarding section in September, November, January, April and June of every school year. EDB would refer students to the special schools with boarding vacancies based on the information received. EDB did not have information on the number of boarding places that were made available as a result of the regular reviews conducted by schools.

To ensure that boarding services are provided to students with the most genuine needs, Audit considers that EDB needs to provide assistance to special schools in reviewing the boarding needs of existing boarders, such as issuing guidelines to schools on how to conduct regular reviews of the boarding needs of existing boarders.

Need to consider adopting more flexibility in placement arrangements of seven-day boarding service for students with SID or PD

2.30 The schools for children with VI, the school for children with HI, and SSDs accept boarders on a territory-wide basis. The prevailing placement mechanism of students to boarding services of the schools for children with MoID, children with SID and children with PD which provide boarding services on catchment area basis is as follows:

- (a) ***Five-day boarding service.*** There is a queue for each special school providing five-day boarding service. Parents are required to apply for a school whose catchment area covers their residence. A student will be offered a boarding place when it is available from the school; and
- (b) ***Seven-day boarding service.*** EDB maintains a central queue for seven-day boarding service. Parents are required to indicate their preference on schools:
 - (i) ***No preference on a particular school.*** If the parents of a student have no preference on a particular school, the student will be offered a boarding place as soon as it is available from any school regardless of the student's residential address; or

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- (ii) *Specifying a particular school.* According to EDB, students with SID or PD have mobility problems and should reside in boarding section in the vicinity of their residential address as far as possible to facilitate arrangement for returning home when needed. Parents of students with SID or PD can only specify a school whose catchment area covers their residence. Parents of students with MoID can specify any school regardless of their residential address. Students will be offered a boarding place when a place from the specified school is available.

2.31 In response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit in September 2019 that the rationale behind the restriction for students with SID or PD applying for seven-day boarding service (i.e. can only specify a school whose catchment area covers the students' residence) was to even out the number of students waiting for seven-day boarding service of specific schools as far as possible. Audit considers that EDB needs to consider adopting more flexibility in the placement arrangements of seven-day boarding service for students with SID and students with PD.

Need to enhance transparency on the information of boarding places provided by special schools

2.32 Boarding places for students with MoID are not sufficient to meet the demand (see para. 2.21). Students with MoID need to wait for some time before boarding places are available to them (see para. 2.22). It will greatly facilitate the parents in their applications for boarding places if EDB enhances transparency on the number of and the average waiting time for boarding places provided by the special schools. Waiting time for boarding places at special schools has been a matter of concern for the public and the Legislative Council (Note 20). Audit noted that EDB did not release the number of and the average waiting time for boarding places provided by special schools. Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to enhance transparency on the information of boarding places provided by special schools.

Note 20: *For example, during the examination of the Estimates of Expenditures for financial year 2016-17 in April 2016, and during a meeting of the Legislative Council in May 2018, Members of the Legislative Council raised enquiries on the waiting situation for boarding places in special schools.*

Audit recommendations

- 2.33 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**
- (a) **explore the feasibility of implementing measures with a view to making more efficient use of the boarding places and shortening the waiting time for seven-day boarding places in schools for children with SID, such as:**
 - (i) **converting some vacant five-day boarding places to seven-day boarding places; and**
 - (ii) **allowing students with SID waiting for seven-day boarding places to use vacant five-day boarding places temporarily before seven-day boarding places are available;**
 - (b) **step up EDB's efforts in exploring effective measures to increase the supply of new boarding places with a view to shortening the waiting time of students with MoID for boarding services;**
 - (c) **with a view to ensuring that boarding services are provided to students with the most genuine needs, provide assistance to special schools in reviewing the boarding needs of existing boarders, such as issuing guidelines to schools on how to conduct regular reviews of the boarding needs of existing boarders;**
 - (d) **consider adopting more flexibility in the placement arrangements of seven-day boarding service for students with SID and students with PD; and**
 - (e) **take measures to enhance transparency on the information of boarding places provided by special schools.**
- 2.34 **Audit has *recommended* that the Director of Social Welfare should keep in view the utilisation of boarding places in residential homes of SSDs and continue to take measures to make good use of the vacant boarding places where appropriate.**

Response from the Government

2.35 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations in paragraph 2.33. He has said that:

- (a) EDB has all along been encouraging the special schools which offer five-day boarding services only to provide seven-day boarding places. EDB will introduce more support to schools to encourage their converting five-day boarding places to seven-day boarding places. EDB will also discuss with special schools the feasibility of offering vacant five-day boarding places as a temporary arrangement for students with SID who are waiting for seven-day boarding service;
- (b) several works projects to provide new boarding places for student with MoID are expected to be completed in the next few years. In the interim, EDB will continue to explore other feasible ways, such as making use of the space available in existing boarding sections of ID schools, to increase the supply with reference to the actual demand for the boarding places;
- (c) EDB will discuss with special schools the procedures for conducting school-based review of students' boarding needs. Guidelines will be issued accordingly;
- (d) as mentioned in paragraph 2.31, the rationale of setting the restriction is to even out the number of applications for seven-day boarding service in the schools for children with SID concerned. Nevertheless, EDB will explore the possibility of allowing parents of children with SID and children with PD to apply for seven-day boarding places in special schools whose catchment areas do not cover their residence while the aforementioned rationale can be maintained; and
- (e) EDB will take measures to enhance transparency on the information about provision of boarding places in special schools for public's reference.

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2.36 The Director of Social Welfare agrees with the audit recommendation in paragraph 2.34. He has said that on top of the measures being implemented, SWD will continue to:

- (a) keep in view the utilisation of boarding places at SSDs; and
- (b) take measures to make good use of the vacant boarding places where appropriate.

PART 3: STAFFING OF SPECIAL SCHOOLS

3.1 This PART examines the staffing issues in special schools. Audit found room for improvement in the following areas:

- (a) wastage of special school teachers (paras. 3.2 to 3.6);
- (b) unfilled posts of specialist staff and non-specialist staff (paras. 3.7 to 3.15);
and
- (c) professional training for special school teachers (paras. 3.16 to 3.26).

Wastage of special school teachers

3.2 In 2018/19, the establishment and staff strength of teachers for the 60 special schools were 1,945 and 1,880 respectively. EDB defines the wastage rate of teachers in special schools as the number of drop-out teachers (i.e. teachers who were serving in the special school sector in the preceding school year but no longer serving in the sector in the school year concerned) as a percentage of the total number of teachers in special schools in the preceding school year.

Need to closely monitor wastage rate of special school teachers

3.3 Audit examined the wastage rate of teachers in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 and found that:

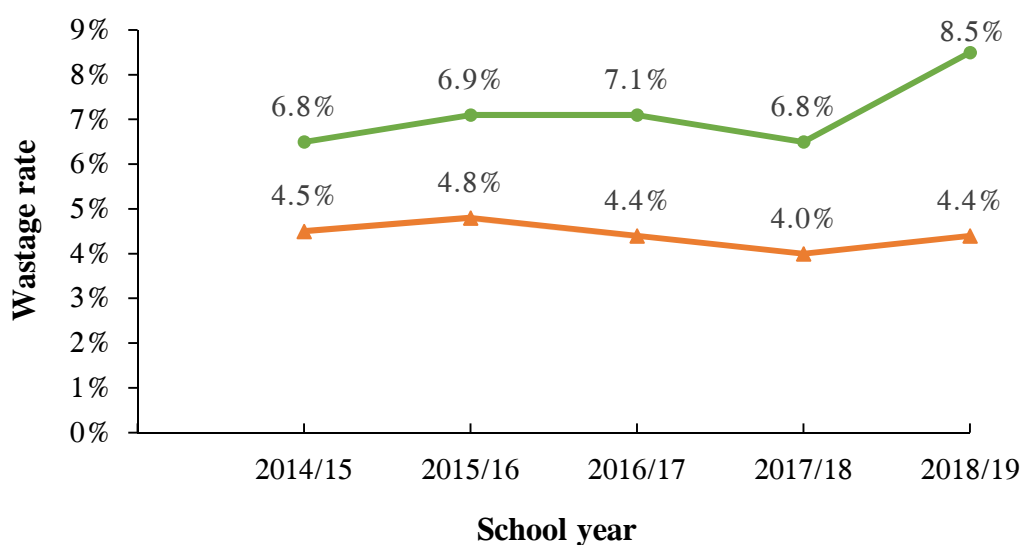
- (a) the wastage rate of teachers in special schools was higher than that for teachers in ordinary schools; and
- (b) while the wastage rate of teachers in ordinary schools was relatively stable ranging from 4% to 4.8%, the wastage rate of teachers in special schools had increased significantly from 6.8% in 2014/15 to 8.5% in 2018/19 (see Figure 4).

Staffing of special schools

According to EDB, given the much smaller number of teachers in special schools as compared with ordinary schools, a small turnover in terms of numbers will result in a wastage rate that is higher when put side by side with the wastage rate of teachers in ordinary schools.

Figure 4

Wastage rate of special school teachers (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Legend: ● Special schools
▲ Ordinary schools

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

3.4 Audit considers that EDB needs to keep in view the wastage rate of special school teachers and, where necessary, explore appropriate measures to address the issue.

Audit recommendation

3.5 Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should keep in view the wastage rate of special school teachers and, where necessary, explore appropriate measures to address the relatively higher wastage rate of special school teachers.

Response from the Government

3.6 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation. He has said that the ratio of graduate teacher posts in the special schools has been increased to 100% so as to enhance the quality of teaching and attract more talents. Additional manpower and resources have also been provided for special schools to support the teachers and to enhance their career development. EDB will keep in view the wastage rate of special school teachers and introduce relevant measures as appropriate.

Unfilled posts of specialist staff and non-specialist staff

3.7 In addition to teachers, special schools are also provided with specialist staff and non-specialist staff (see para. 1.9(a)) to cater for the specific needs of the students. EDB has not monitored the wastage rate for specialist staff and non-specialist staff.

Difficulties in filling posts of occupational therapists and physiotherapists

3.8 Specialist staff in special schools include OTs, occupational therapy assistants, PTs, nurses, braille staff, social workers, educational psychologists and speech therapists. For special schools with a boarding section, the specialist staff provided also include wardens, assistant wardens, nurses, houseparents and programme workers. In 2018/19, the establishment of specialist staff for the 60 special schools was 1,181 staff.

3.9 Among the various types of specialist staff, it was particularly difficult to have all OT and PT posts filled. To alleviate the recruitment difficulties of staff, in 2012/13, EDB allowed special schools to freeze the unfilled posts of OTs and PTs in return for cash grants for hiring short-term or part-time occupational therapy and physiotherapy services. Audit examined the number of unfilled posts for OTs and PTs and the respective percentages of the establishment in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19. Audit found that the vacancy situation of OTs and PTs remained serious after some of the posts had been frozen (see Table 13):

Staffing of special schools

- (a) ***OTs***. Each year the number of unfilled posts as a percentage of the establishment ranged from 22% to 49% (averaged 37%). After freezing some unfilled posts, the average percentage of vacant posts remained as high as 13%, ranging from 8% to 17%; and

- (b) ***PTs***. Each year the number of unfilled posts as a percentage of the establishment ranged from 39% to 48% (averaged 44%). After freezing some unfilled posts, the average percentage of vacant posts remained as high as 15%, ranging from 10% to 22%.

Table 13

**Number of unfilled posts for OTs and PTs
(2014/15 to 2018/19)**

Year	Establishment	No. (percentage) of unfilled posts		
		Vacant posts (a)	Frozen posts (b)	Total (c) = (a) + (b)
OTs				
2014/15	60	10 (17%)	7 (11%)	17 (28%)
2015/16	59	10 (17%)	7 (12%)	17 (29%)
2016/17	59	5 (8%)	8 (14%)	13 (22%)
2017/18	98 (Note)	15 (15%)	33 (34%)	48 (49%)
2018/19	99	10 (10%)	34 (34%)	44 (44%)
Average	75	10 (13%)	18 (24%)	28 (37%)
PTs				
2014/15	60	9 (15%)	15 (25%)	24 (40%)
2015/16	59	13 (22%)	12 (20%)	25 (42%)
2016/17	59	6 (10%)	17 (29%)	23 (39%)
2017/18	59	6 (10%)	21 (36%)	27 (46%)
2018/19	60	9 (15%)	20 (33%)	29 (48%)
Average	59	9 (15%)	17 (29%)	26 (44%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: Prior to 2017/18, OTs were only provided to schools for children with PD and SID. Starting from 2017/18, OTs have also been provided to all special schools except the Hospital School and SSDs. This led to the increase in the establishment of OTs.

Staffing of special schools

3.10 Audit noted that since 2011, the Hong Kong Special Schools Council (HKSSC — Note 21) had repeatedly reflected the difficulties in filling OT and PT posts in its meetings with EDB. During the meetings held in March 2017 and July 2018 with EDB, HKSSC stated that the following factors might have resulted in the recruitment difficulties of OTs and PTs:

- (a) more attractive remuneration package was offered by other non-governmental organisations and the Hospital Authority (HA); and
- (b) the working years and experience of OTs and PTs in special schools might not be recognised by HA.

Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to address the difficulties faced by special schools in filling OT and PT posts with a view to better catering for the needs of the students studying in special schools.

High vacancy of some types of non-specialist staff

3.11 Non-specialist staff in special schools include clerks, clerical assistants, teacher assistants, artisans, drivers and workshop attendants. For special schools with a boarding section, the non-specialist staff provided also include cooks and watchmen. In 2018/19, the establishment of non-specialist staff was 792 staff.

3.12 Audit examined the vacancy of different types of non-specialist staff in 2018/19 and found that high vacancy rates existed in four types of non-specialist staff, namely teacher assistants (18%), cooks (16%), workshop attendants (15%) and watchmen (12%) (see Table 14).

Note 21: *HKSSC comprises special schools of all types in Hong Kong. The purpose of the Council is to: (a) promote the development of special schools and special education in Hong Kong; (b) promote the interests of special schools, including their students and staff; (c) serve as a bridge between its member schools and EDB; and (d) organise various types of activities that promote professional development and cooperation.*

Table 14

**Number of establishment and vacancy of non-specialist staff analysed by post
(2018/19)**

Non-specialist staff	Establishment (a)	No. of posts vacant (b)	Vacancy rate (c) = (b)/(a) × 100%
Teacher assistants	358	63	18%
Cooks	89	14	16%
Workshop attendants	34	5	15%
Watchmen	42	5	12%
Others (Note)	269	18	7%
Overall	792	105	13%

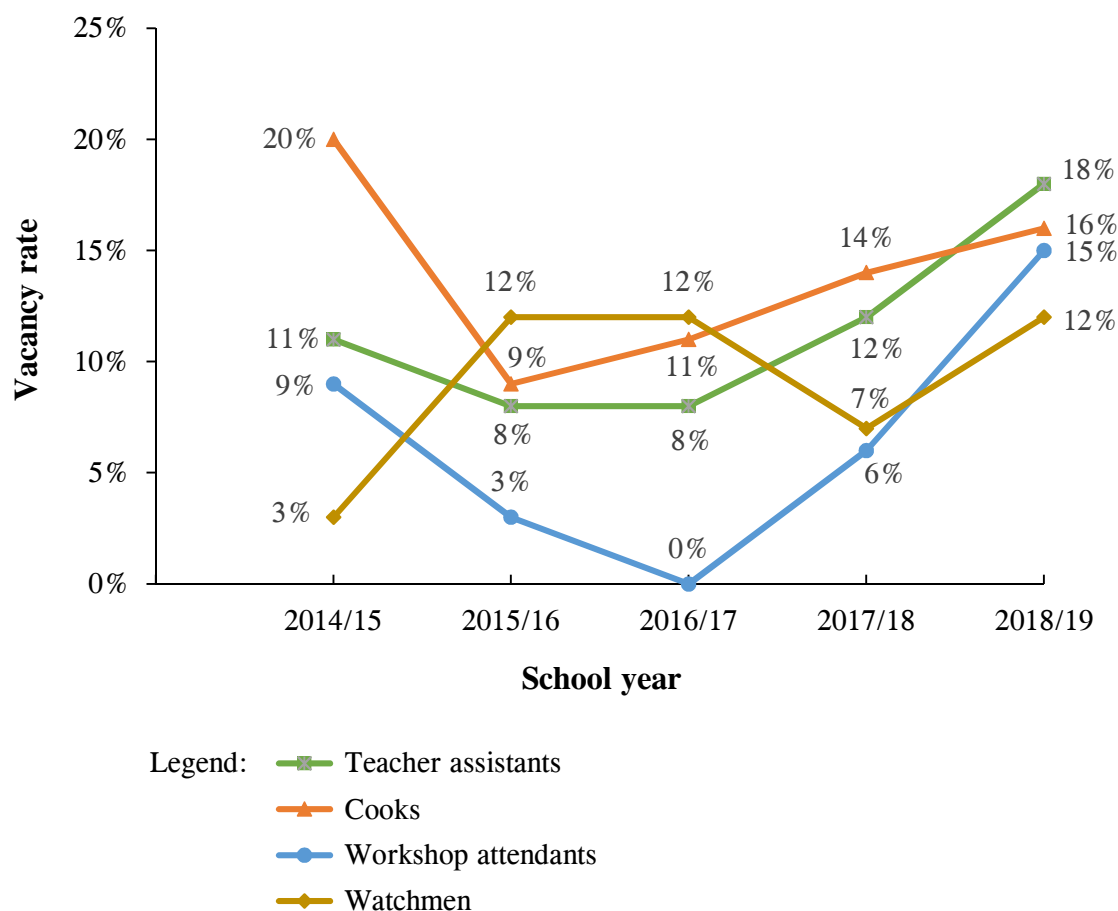
Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: Other non-specialist staff include clerical staff, laboratory technicians, artisans and drivers.

3.13 Audit analysed the vacancy rates of the four types of non-specialist staff for the period 2014/15 to 2018/19 and found that the vacancy rates of three of the four types of non-specialist staff (i.e. except watchmen) had shown an increasing trend since 2016/17 (see Figure 5). Audit considers that EDB needs to monitor the vacancy situation of non-specialist staff in special schools and take measures to reduce the vacancy rate where necessary with a view to mitigating the adverse impacts on the operations of special schools due to staff shortage.

Figure 5

Analysis of four types of non-specialist staff with high vacancy rates (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Audit recommendations

3.14 Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:

- take measures to address the difficulties faced by special schools in filling OT and PT posts; and
- monitor the vacancy situation of non-specialist staff in special schools and take measures to reduce the vacancy rate where necessary.

Response from the Government

3.15 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) the difficulties of filling OT and PT posts are faced by various sectors, including special schools. The main reason is due to the insufficient manpower supply in the market. EDB will pass to the Food and Health Bureau the manpower demand for OT and PT in the school sector so that the Bureau can take such information into account when drawing up the specific manpower requirements under the triennial planning exercise of the University Grants Committee (UGC), thereby increasing the manpower-planned places for OT and PT programmes offered by UGC funded universities, and encourage self-financing post-secondary education sector to offer designated programmes through the Study Subsidy Scheme for Designated Professions/Sectors to nurture talent in support of specific industries with keen demand for human resources. To alleviate the recruitment difficulties of OT and PT, special schools may continue to freeze some of the OT and PT vacancies in exchange for cash grants to recruit temporary staff or hire related services; and
- (b) EDB will monitor the vacancy situation of non-specialist staff and consider providing more flexibility to special schools in freezing some of those unfilled posts in return for cash grants as appropriate.

Professional training for special school teachers

3.16 In 2007/08, EDB launched the teacher professional development framework on integrated education for both teachers of ordinary schools and teachers of special schools to enhance their professional capacity in catering for students with SEN. Under the framework, training courses pitched at three levels, namely Basic, Advanced and Thematic (BAT), are conducted (Note 22).

Note 22: *To enhance schools' flexibility in planning their manpower deployment, during the absence of teachers when they are attending professional training courses, both ordinary and special schools are provided with a grant for the employment of substitute teachers.*

Staffing of special schools

3.17 In view of the different educational needs of students enrolled in special schools, Training Course for Special School Teachers (TCSST) specifically offered to special school teachers has been launched since 2012/13. TCSST includes 240-hour theory-based lectures, comprising four modules:

- (a) theories, principles and practices in special education;
- (b) academic and learning support;
- (c) behavioural, emotional and social development support; and
- (d) sensory, communication and physical support.

In addition to lectures, a 6-month practicum will also be arranged in TCSST. Course tutors will organise lesson observations cum discussions, project work and experience sharing sessions for the participants to help them transfer the knowledge acquired into practical skills in the real classroom (see also Note 22 to para. 3.16).

Need to monitor the attainment of teacher training target

3.18 In 2018/19, to enhance the professional qualification of special school teachers, after consulting the special school sector, EDB set a teacher training target for all special schools, namely by the end of 2022/23, each special school should have 85% to 100% of its teachers having completed specified special education training (SET). Teachers are considered having completed SET after they have completed at least one of the following programmes:

- (a) TCSST;
- (b) a minimum of 240 hours of BAT courses; and
- (c) other structured training courses recognised by EDB as equivalent to TCSST.

3.19 EDB recognises teachers in special schools who have completed structured training courses that are equivalent to TCSST as teachers who have completed SET (see para. 3.18(c)). Under the prevailing mechanism, training information is submitted by teachers and endorsed by schools. EDB analysed such training information to assess whether the training courses were equivalent to TCSST. Audit noted that:

- (a) EDB had not promulgated the recognition criteria to help teachers and principals understand whether the courses attended by teachers were equivalent to TCSST; and
- (b) individual schools did not know the percentage of their teachers who had completed SET.

Audit considers that EDB needs to promulgate the recognition criteria of training courses that are equivalent to TCSST to facilitate special schools to take measures to achieve the teacher training target set by EDB. EDB also needs to regularly ascertain the percentage of teachers who have completed SET in each special school and monitor the progress of the special schools in attaining the target of 85% to 100% by 2022/23.

Need to increase the number of training places of TCSST

3.20 Since the introduction of TCSST in 2012/13, 40 training places of TCSST have been provided by EDB each year. In the period from 2012/13 to 2018/19, 241 special school teachers completed TCSST.

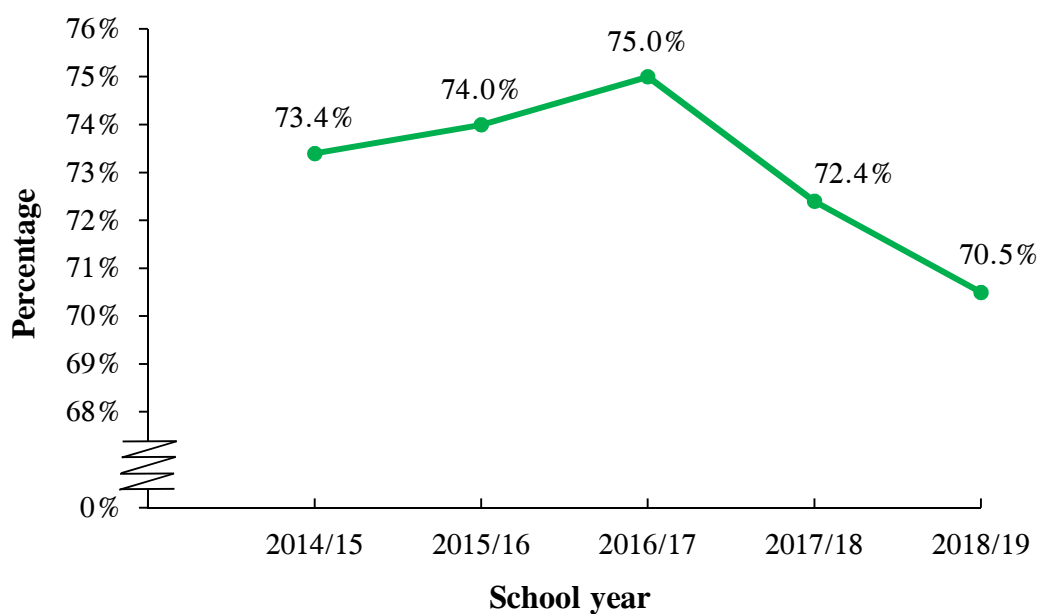
3.21 TCSST is specifically offered to special school teachers in view of the different educational needs of students enrolled in special schools from those in ordinary schools and feedback on TCSST from the special school sector was good and positive. In 2018/19, all the 40 training places of TCSST were fully enrolled. To facilitate schools in achieving the teacher training target of 85% to 100% by 2022/23, Audit considers that EDB needs to keep in view the adequacy of TCSST training places for special school teachers and increase the number of training places where necessary.

Decreasing percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification

3.22 The percentage of teachers in special schools with special education training qualification (Note 23) is one of the key performance measures in EDB's Controlling Officer's Report (COR). Audit examined the percentage of teachers in special schools with special education training qualification as reported in COR in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 and noted that the percentage increased from 73.4% in 2014/15 to 75% in 2016/17 and then decreased to 70.5% in 2018/19 (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification (2014/15 to 2018/19)



Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note 23: Teachers with special education training qualification refer to those who have attended training courses such as BAT courses, TCSST or other relevant training programmes endorsed by schools (see para. 3.24).

3.23 Audit also noted that for the 60 special schools in 2018/19:

- (a) there were 7 (11.6%) schools having less than half of the teachers with special education training qualification (see Table 15); and
- (b) the average percentage of teachers with special education training qualification was 70.5%, ranging from 35% to 95%.

In response to Audit’s enquiry, EDB informed Audit in September 2019 that the decrease in percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification from 2017/18 to 2018/19 was due to the increase of teacher-to-class ratio for public sector primary and secondary schools (including special schools) by 0.1 in July 2017. Schools might have recruited some teachers who had yet to obtain the special education training qualification.

Table 15

Percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification (2018/19)

Percentage	No. of schools (percentage)
30% to <40%	2 (3.3%) } 7 (11.6%)
40% to <50%	5 (8.3%) }
50% to <60%	7 (11.6%)
60% to <70%	13 (21.7%)
70% to <80%	15 (25.0%)
80% to <90%	16 (26.8%)
90% to 100%	2 (3.3%)
Total	60 (100.0%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Staffing of special schools

3.24 The percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification reported in COR was compiled based on the training information submitted by teachers. Such information included various training courses attended by the teachers such as BAT courses, TCSST, or other relevant special education training programmes. Audit noted that EDB had not promulgated the criteria for recognising other relevant training programmes as special education training qualification. With a view to enhancing the professional capacity of special school teachers in catering for their students, Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to increase the percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification. EDB also needs to promulgate the criteria for recognising training programmes as special education training qualification and use the criteria as the basis in the performance measurement and reporting in EDB's COR as appropriate.

Audit recommendations

3.25 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **promulgate the recognition criteria of training courses that are equivalent to TCSST to facilitate special schools to take measures to achieve the teacher training target set by EDB;**
- (b) **regularly ascertain the percentage of teachers who have completed SET in each special school and monitor the progress of the special schools in attaining the target of 85% to 100% by 2022/23;**
- (c) **keep in view the adequacy of TCSST training places for special school teachers and increase the number of training places where necessary;**
- (d) **take measures to increase the percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification; and**
- (e) **promulgate the criteria for recognising training programmes as special education training qualification and use the criteria as the basis in the performance measurement and reporting in EDB's COR as appropriate.**

Response from the Government

3.26 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) EDB has been analysing internally the percentage of special school teachers with special education training qualification according to a set of course recognition criteria. EDB will promulgate the recognition criteria of special education training courses for special schools' reference and use this as the basis of the performance measurement given in EDB's COR as appropriate; and
- (b) EDB will closely monitor the progress of training target achieved by individual special schools and increase the number of training places of TCSST provided in the coming school years if necessary. At the same time, EDB will encourage special school teachers to attend the training courses so that the training target can be attained in or before 2022/23.

PART 4: GRANTS AND SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

4.1 This PART examines EDB's grants and support for special education, focusing on the following areas:

- (a) Tripartite Model of Support (paras. 4.2 to 4.7);
- (b) grants provided to cater for special school students with medical complexity (paras. 4.8 to 4.16);
- (c) funding support for meeting recurrent expenses on furniture and equipment (paras. 4.17 to 4.22); and
- (d) school leaving arrangements for special school students (paras. 4.23 to 4.30).

Tripartite Model of Support

4.2 Since 2009/10, EDB has adopted the Tripartite Model of Support (TMS) to enhance the communication and collaboration with special schools as well as strengthen professional development of teachers. TMS is structured according to a threefold mechanism:

- (a) ***Cross-Sector Communication.*** It is attained through theme-based visits to special schools in every school year by EDB (on themes such as Implementation of Information Technology in Learning and Teaching, and Catering for Students' Learning Diversity) to understand the latest development and educational outcomes of the schools;

- (b) ***Network Enhancement.*** It is delivered in the mode of learning circles among participating special schools. Through specifically defined teaching topics, such as in Mathematics and General Studies, the participating schools in the learning circles are to experiment or review the implementation of various learning and teaching strategies together so as to enhance teaching effectiveness; and
- (c) ***Individual Development Programme.*** Some special schools are invited by EDB to participate in the Individual Development Programme. These schools are nominated based on EDB's assessments during visits to the schools. The Programme focuses on upgrading learning and teaching of the participating schools through specific projects.

Need to encourage participation in sharing sessions

4.3 Under the Cross-Sector Communication of TMS, EDB conducts theme-based visits to special schools every school year to establish and sustain a communication platform with them. Since 2016/17, EDB has arranged a sharing session for special schools after the theme-based visits of each school year to disseminate the good practices of learning and teaching and to promote professional development among personnel of special schools. In the period from 2016/17 to 2018/19, four sharing sessions were held covering the theme-based visits conducted from 2014/15 to 2017/18. Audit examination found that the percentage of special schools participating in the sharing sessions was not high, ranging from 45.9% to 70.0% and averaging 54.4%. Audit considers that EDB needs to take appropriate measures to encourage schools' participation.

Participation in learning circles not high

4.4 Learning circles are arranged under the Network Enhancement of TMS. All special schools are invited to apply and EDB selects the schools for participation in learning circles based on their development needs. Through a specifically defined theme of "Application of Theory of Variation through Lesson Study for Special Schools", the participating schools experiment or review the implementation of various learning and teaching strategies together in the learning circles through workshops, sharing and meetings, etc.

Grants and support for special education

4.5 In the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18, each year EDB selected 8 special schools and grouped them into 2 learning circles. During the period, 10 learning circles were arranged with 40 participation opportunities. Audit examined the participation in the learning circles by the 60 special schools that were in operation during the full period from 2013/14 to 2017/18 and noted that:

- (a) 33 (55%) did not apply for the participation in the learning circles; and
- (b) the yearly average number of schools submitted an application was 10.6, ranging from 8 to 14 schools each year.

Audit noted that the theme of the learning circles has remained unchanged for the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18. In response to Audit's enquiries, EDB informed Audit in July 2019 that they were conducting a review of the learning circles (including the theme). Audit considers that EDB needs to enhance the attractiveness of the learning circles by adopting different themes for the learning circles, taking into account special schools' needs so as to better meet their needs and to facilitate their professional development.

Audit recommendations

4.6 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **take appropriate measures to encourage special schools' participation in sharing sessions under Cross-Sector Communication of TMS; and**
- (b) **enhance the attractiveness of the learning circles under Network Enhancement of TMS by adopting different themes for the learning circles, taking into account special schools' needs so as to better meet their needs and to facilitate their professional development.**

Response from the Government

4.7 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that:

- (a) all along, different sections of EDB organise various professional development activities for special schools every school year. Special schools arrange relevant teachers and staff to participate in the support programmes, seminars, workshops, experience sharing sessions, etc. based on their school-based developmental needs. EDB will continue to take measures to encourage special schools' participation in the sharing sessions under Cross-Sector Communication of TMS; and
- (b) EDB continuously reviews the relevance and effectiveness of various support programmes. In determining the participation of any professional development activities, special schools will consider a number of school-based factors, such as the schools' development needs at different stages and their individual major areas of concern. EDB will review the implementation of TMS, in particular the Network Enhancement, to better address the special schools' needs on professional development.

Grants provided to cater for special school students with medical complexity

4.8 Many special school students suffer from one or more medical conditions. Based on the criteria formulated jointly with HA, EDB has a pre-defined list of medical conditions that can be classified as medical complexity (MC). MCs refer to students with:

- (a) ***Severe chronic condition.*** This refers to the presence of one or more chronic clinical life-long conditions that are severe and/or associated with medical fragility, such as severe neurologic impairments, severe respiratory problems, complex cardiac conditions and severe behavioural problems;
- (b) ***Functional limitations.*** Functional limitations refer to conditions that require assistance from technology, such as feeding tube or ventilator supports;

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- (c) *Special medical care needs.* These refer to substantial health care service needs such as medical care and specialised therapy; and
- (d) *Frequent or prolonged health care use.* This refers to projected high utilisation of health care resources, such as frequent or prolonged hospitalisation, multiple surgeries or ongoing involvement of multiple services.

4.9 To provide support to special schools in handling students with medical issues, EDB has provided the Additional Support Grant for Enhancing the Support for Boarders with Medical Complexity in Aided Special Schools (hereinafter referred to as Boarder MC Grant) since 2014/15. It is provided to special schools with boarding sections. In 2017/18, EDB extended the Boarder MC Grant to day students and day students cum boarders with MC by providing the Additional Support Grant for Day Students and Day Students cum Boarders with Medical Complexity (hereinafter referred to as Day MC Grant). Schools with and without boarding sections for children with MoID, children with SID, children with PD, children with HI and children with VI are eligible. EDB will consider the suspected students with MC put up by special schools based on the feedback from HA on the medical situation of the students:

- (a) for suspected paediatric cases, the medical assessment is conducted by HA and arranged through EDB; and
- (b) for suspected psychiatric cases, schools have to submit their requests for medical information to HA directly.

4.10 The grants are provided to special schools in accordance with the number of students with MC, their tier of support, and the type of boarders (i.e. five-day or seven-day) in the case for the Boarder MC Grant. There are two tiers of supports. Students requiring Tier 2 support are students with MC conditions more severe than those requiring Tier 1 support. The rates of the grants are adjusted annually in accordance with the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index. Special schools can use the grants for employing additional staff such as health care workers, procuring health care services or arranging staff training. For 2018/19, the amounts of grant under the Boarder MC Grant and the Day MC Grant are as follows:

Grants and support for special education

- (a) ***Boarder MC Grant.*** The grants per five-day boarder with MC requiring Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports were \$16,524 and \$27,540 per annum respectively, and the grants per seven-day boarder with MC requiring Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports were \$33,049 and \$55,081 per annum respectively, subject to a minimum provision of \$176,259 per school per annum (i.e. a school would be granted \$176,259 even if it had only one boarder with MC). The total amount of Boarder MC Grant provided to special schools in 2018/19 was \$10.4 million; and

- (b) ***Day MC Grant.*** The grants per day student or day student cum boarder with MC requiring Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports were \$8,263 and \$13,771 per annum respectively, subject to a minimum provision of \$176,259 per school per annum. The total amount of Day MC Grant provided to special schools in 2018/19 was \$8.1 million.

In recent years, there were more and more students meeting the medical conditions for MC grants. The number of students meeting the medical conditions for the Boarder MC Grant increased by 128 (66%) from 193 in 2014/15 to 321 in 2018/19. The number of students meeting the medical conditions for the Day MC Grant increased by 82 (25%) from 330 in 2017/18 to 412 in 2018/19.

Need to ensure that the amount of Day MC Grant is adequate to meet the needs of special schools

4.11 The Day MC Grant was launched in 2017/18. To be eligible for the Day MC Grant, special schools are required to complete an application form based on the medical information sheet of individual students with MC provided by HA or Department of Health (DH) (Note 24) and submit the application form to EDB by January each year. The medical assessment for suspected paediatric cases by HA is arranged through EDB. Audit noted that:

- (a) in August 2017, EDB conducted survey to collect information of suspected day students with MC from special schools. A total of 352 suspected paediatric cases were reported by 33 schools;

Note 24: *To facilitate the schools in applying for Boarder MC Grant and Day MC Grant, the child assessment services of DH provide relevant medical information of children with MC when referring them for special school placement.*

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- (b) in September 2017, in a meeting between EDB and HA, HA advised EDB that:
 - (i) HA was facing acute shortage of manpower and there were difficulties in providing assessment support to the suspected day students with MC;
 - (ii) the assessment support to the suspected day students with MC for the Day MC Grant would be a one-off ad hoc task;
 - (iii) for special schools with no boarders with MC, HA would assess one suspected day student with MC from each school so as to facilitate the schools to apply for the minimum provision of the Day MC Grant; and
 - (iv) for special schools with day students cum boarders with MC eligible, their suspected non-boarder day students with MC would not be given priority in this ad hoc task (Note 25);
- (c) in October 2017, EDB requested special schools to resubmit the information of their suspected day students with MC. Only 90 cases were submitted by 23 schools, dropping by 262 (74.4%) from 352 cases submitted by schools in August 2017. EDB submitted the 90 cases to HA for medical assessment; and
- (d) similar situation recurred for the processing of the Day MC Grant in 2018/19. In September 2018, a total of 265 paediatric cases were reported by 32 schools. In October 2018, only 6 cases were submitted by 3 schools, dropping by 259 (97.7%) from 265 cases submitted by schools in September 2018.

Note 25: *Day students cum boarders with MC are also eligible for the application of the Day MC Grant. Therefore, the schools concerned can at least apply for the minimum provision of the Day MC Grant even if their suspected non-boarder day students with MC are not assessed.*

Grants and support for special education

4.12 A school can receive the minimum provision of the Day MC Grant if at least one student meets the medical conditions for the Grant. In July 2019, in response to Audit's enquiry, EDB informed Audit that:

- (a) the minimum provision was roughly equal to the provision for 21 cases of Tier 1 support or 12 cases of Tier 2 support; and
- (b) only special schools which might be eligible for amount of grant more than the minimum needed to submit additional suspected case for assessments.

4.13 In response to Audit's enquiry, HA informed Audit in October 2019 that:

- (a) in 2013, data provided by EDB showed that there were 600 handicapped students receiving boarding services in 17 special schools. In 2014/15, there were 21 special schools with boarding sections requiring HA supporting children with MC who were under their boarding services. Noting the increasing demand for discharge planning and post-discharge support for these children with MC and the increasing health care complexity of these children and complex care tasks required, e.g. management of gastrostomy, feeding and tracheostomy, etc., HA took the initiative to provide carer training in the special schools and continuous support on the caring needs of these children with MC. The aim was to enhance the capability of these special schools to cope with the increasing demand of these children with MC under their boarding services;
- (b) since 2014-15, HA has implemented the Children with Medical Complexity Community Support Programme (CCSP) with an aim to support care of children with MC in the community. With additional resources from the Government via the Resource Allocation Exercise, a total of eight Advanced Practice Nurses were recruited for 2014-15 and 2016-17 to serve as CCSP Coordinators for providing the service, including two visits per year to each boarding child with MC in special schools, formulating care plan and updating medical information of children with MC to EDB, providing health talks and train-the-trainer programmes to empower school staff in taking care of children with MC in the boarding sections of 21 special schools; and

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- (c) upon the launch of Day MC Grant in 2017/18, EDB had an ad hoc meeting with HA in September 2017 to discuss their request for HA to provide medical assessment to suspected MC students in the additional 19 day special schools. At the meeting, HA explained to EDB that as CCSP aimed to cover special schools with boarding sections, CCSP Coordinators would not have capacity to provide medical assessments to all suspected cases in both day and boarding special schools. Notwithstanding this, HA, on the basis of goodwill as well as not jeopardising the existing CCSP services for children with MC in the boarding sections of 21 special schools, agreed to provide a one-off ad hoc medical assessment in 2017 and 2018 for students suspected with MC in the additional 19 day special schools to facilitate the schools to apply for the minimum provision of the Day MC Grant.

4.14 Audit considers that the situation can be improved because:

- (a) in view of the large number of suspected cases initially reported by special schools, the actual number of day students with MC may be much higher if all suspected cases were assessed. Some schools may be eligible for additional amount of the Day MC Grant but have not submitted the suspected MC cases even though they may be entitled to grant more than the minimum; and
- (b) the arrangement with HA for conducting medical assessments remains a one-off ad hoc task. The processing of the Day MC Grant will be seriously affected should HA cease to conduct medical assessment for paediatric cases of suspected day students with MC.

EDB needs to, in collaboration with HA, take measures to ensure that special schools are provided with Day MC Grant that can adequately meet their needs. For example, EDB needs to explore with HA the feasibility of regularising the medical assessment arrangement and explore the feasibility to conduct medical assessments for more suspected day students with MC.

Audit recommendation

4.15 Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should, in collaboration with the Chief Executive of HA, take measures to ensure that special schools are provided with Day MC Grant that can adequately meet their needs.

Response from the Government

4.16 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation. He has said that EDB has all along been working closely with HA to review the assessment mechanism that has been in place since 2017/18. EDB will continue to explore with HA the feasibility of regularising the medical assessment arrangement and collect data from the eligible special schools to ensure that the Day MC Grant can meet their operational need.

Funding support for meeting recurrent expenses on furniture and equipment

4.17 To cater for the diverse needs of students with severe disabilities, special schools need to procure various furniture and equipment (F&E) items. EDB is responsible for the F&E cost for new special schools, and for reprovisioning, redevelopment or expansion projects of existing special schools. The F&E list and hence subsidy are determined by the new schools' needs and individual circumstances of the projects concerned. Regarding the funding support provided by EDB to cover the recurrent cost of F&E items procured using different funding sources, Audit noted that there were difficulties facing special schools.

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Inconsistent provision of funding support for F&E procured using different funding sources

- 4.18 Recurrent cost of F&E items is covered by the following arrangements:
- (a) surplus of the block grant from EDB (Note 26) can be used to top up no more than 25% of recurrent cost arising from F&E items acquired through private donations or other fund-raising schemes; and
 - (b) for F&E items included in the F&E list for a school or acquired with the block grant, the school can use the block grant to fully cover the associated recurrent cost.

These arrangements apply to all schools including ordinary schools.

4.19 Some F&E items such as ceiling hoist (see Photograph 1 – Note 27) would greatly enhance the special schools' support provided to children with MC. Audit reviewed the funding support for ceiling hoist and noted that:

- (a) ceiling hoists were not included in the F&E list for special schools before 2016. According to EDB, most existing schools for children with PD and schools for children with SID had installed ceiling hoists in their schools using their own funding sources, such as private donations or other fund-raising schemes; and
- (b) in a recent school development project for a new special school for children with ID (MiID, MoID and SID) in Tung Chung (see para. 2.4(a)), EDB supported the inclusion of ceiling hoists in the F&E list (Note 28) for which

Note 26: *The block grant refers to the Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant. It is provided as one block grant and schools are free to deploy the funding flexibly.*

Note 27: *There are two types of hoists, namely ceiling hoists (fixed on the ceiling or walls) and mobile hoists (wheel-based and either electric or manual run). Hoists allow a single caretaker to perform transfers of students with severe mobility problems. This reduces manual lifting and minimises stress or strain.*

Note 28: *EDB considered that ceiling hoists facilitate the work of administering daily care for the weak students with mobility problems and ensure the occupational safety of the care workers.*

the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau approved on a project basis. EDB would be responsible for the cost of ceiling hoists for the new school.

Photograph 1

A ceiling hoist installed in the boarding section of a special school



Source: Photograph taken by Audit on 3 June 2019

4.20 Audit noted that the inclusion of ceiling hoists in the F&E list for the new special school in Tung Chung would give rise to inconsistent provision of funding support by EDB to existing special schools and the new special school:

- (a) ***Existing special schools.*** EDB was not responsible for the cost of ceiling hoists when the special schools were set up, reprovisioned or redeveloped. Schools could use the surplus of their block grant to cover no more than 25% of the recurrent cost of ceiling hoists that they acquired through their own funding sources; and
- (b) ***The new special school.*** EDB would be responsible for the cost of ceiling hoists for the new special school. The school could use its block grant to fully cover the recurrent cost of ceiling hoists.

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Audit considers that the inconsistent provision of funding support to existing special schools and the new special school regarding ceiling hoists needs to be addressed. EDB needs to consider measures to provide funding support to existing special schools to cover the recurrent cost of ceiling hoists as in the new special school. EDB also needs to consider ways to support special schools which had acquired F&E items through their own funding sources that were not in the schools' F&E list but were subsequently included in the F&E list of new special schools.

Audit recommendations

- 4.21 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**
- (a) **consider measures to provide funding support to existing special schools to cover the recurrent cost of ceiling hoists as in the new special school in Tung Chung; and**
 - (b) **consider ways to support special schools which had acquired F&E items through their own funding sources that were not in the schools' F&E list but were subsequently included in the F&E list of new special schools.**

Response from the Government

4.22 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that EDB will examine the existing provisions and explore feasible ways to streamline the arrangements of funding support to existing special schools to cover the recurrent cost of ceiling hoists and those included in the F&E list of the new special school as appropriate.

School leaving arrangements for special school students

4.23 Students of special schools will normally graduate upon completion of Secondary 6. Special schools will help their students plan and apply for post-school placements in accordance with their interests, capabilities and needs. According to EDB, special school leavers mainly have the following school leaving arrangements:

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- (a) ***Employment in open market.*** This includes open market employment and Supported Employment administered by SWD, which is for persons with disabilities in employment to work in an integrated open setting with necessary support services;
- (b) ***Further studies.*** Further studies include local and overseas studies and enrolment in other institutions and programmes, such as the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education and Diploma Yi Jin Programme;
- (c) ***Vocational training.*** Vocational training includes enrolment in the Shine Skills Centre administered by the Vocational Training Council and the Integrated Vocational Training Centre administered by SWD;
- (d) ***Vocational rehabilitation services.*** Vocational rehabilitation services are administered by SWD. The services include Sheltered Workshop and the Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centre;
- (e) ***Day training or care services.*** These include Day Activity Centre, Care and Attention Home for Severely Disabled Persons and Supported Hostel administered by SWD; and
- (f) ***Other arrangements.*** Other arrangements include staying at home, staying in hospital for treatment, migration, enrolment in the Youth Employment and Training Programme, and other programmes offered by the Labour Department.

4.24 There are special circumstances where individual students may need to extend their years of study. In 2010/11, EDB implemented improvement measures on extension of years of study for special schools. It allows schools to exercise school-based professional judgment and arrange for students with such a need and valid reasons to extend their years of study. The valid reasons include:

- (a) the student having been absent from school for more than one-third of the total school days in a school year due to valid reasons, such as suffering from illnesses;

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- (b) the student has major disruptions in learning; and
- (c) the student experiences serious adaptation problems.

According to EDB, the three valid reasons cover most of the situations. However, a small number of students may wish to extend their years of study under special circumstances not covered by the three reasons. Schools may consider such cases on individual merits and allow the students to extend their years of study after taking into account a basket of factors. One of the factors that can be taken into account is that the student is facing difficulties in making school leaving arrangements.

Need to provide more assistance to students in school leaving arrangements

4.25 Audit examined the enrolment of special school leavers for vocational training, vocational rehabilitation services, and day training or care services for the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18 (see Table 16). Audit found that significant percentages of special school leavers who had applied for vocational rehabilitation services and day training or care services were on the waiting lists (ranging from 13.2% to 38.0% and 13.3% to 64.7% respectively).

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Table 16

**Analysis of school leaving arrangements of special school leavers
(2013/14 to 2017/18)**

	No. of special school leavers (percentage)				
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Vocational training					
Admitted	249 (96.1%)	225 (94.9%)	188 (96.9%)	220 (96.9%)	229 (95.4%)
Waiting	10 (3.9%)	12 (5.1%)	6 (3.1%)	7 (3.1%)	11 (4.6%)
Total	259 (100.0%)	237 (100.0%)	194 (100.0%)	227 (100.0%)	240 (100.0%)
Vocational rehabilitation services					
Admitted	80 (62.0%)	92 (86.8%)	82 (67.2%)	65 (65.0%)	96 (71.1%)
Waiting	49 (38.0%)	14 (13.2%)	40 (32.8%)	35 (35.0%)	39 (28.9%)
Total	129 (100.0%)	106 (100.0%)	122 (100.0%)	100 (100.0%)	135 (100.0%)
Day training or care services					
Admitted	85 (59.0%)	156 (86.7%)	108 (75.5%)	70 (51.9%)	49 (35.3%)
Waiting	59 (41.0%)	24 (13.3%)	35 (24.5%)	65 (48.1%)	90 (64.7%)
Total	144 (100.0%)	180 (100.0%)	143 (100.0%)	135 (100.0%)	139 (100.0%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Remarks: The numbers of leavers in this Table represented the positions as at 31 August of the respective school years.

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4.26 Audit also examined the reasons for special school students to extend their years of study for the period from 2013/14 to 2017/18. Audit found that:

- (a) only a minority of students had their years of study extended by schools due to the three valid reasons (see para. 4.24). In each of the five years from 2013/14 to 2017/18, these students represented 13.9% to 20.6% (averaging 18.3%) of the total number of students who extended their years of study; and
- (b) many students had their years of study extended by schools after their difficulties in school leaving arrangements were taken into account as one of the factors. In each of the five years from 2013/14 to 2017/18, these students represented 42.7% to 56.8% (averaging 48.6%) of the total number of students who extended their years of study (see Table 17).

Table 17

**Analysis of reasons for extension of years of study
(2013/14 to 2017/18)**

School year	No. of cases (percentage)			
	Three valid reasons (a)	Involving “difficulties in school leaving arrangements” (b)	Not involving “difficulties in school leaving arrangements” (c)	Total (d) = (a) + (b) + (c)
2013/14	145 (20.6%)	301 (42.7%)	259 (36.7%)	705 (100.0%)
2014/15	116 (18.2%)	304 (47.6%)	218 (34.2%)	638 (100.0%)
2015/16	118 (19.9%)	299 (50.4%)	176 (29.7%)	593 (100.0%)
2016/17	112 (18.5%)	286 (47.1%)	209 (34.4%)	607 (100.0%)
2017/18	79 (13.9%)	323 (56.8%)	167 (29.3%)	569 (100.0%)
Average	114 (18.3%)	302 (48.6%)	206 (33.1%)	622 (100.0%)

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

4.27 Audit considers that the difficulties of special school students in school leaving arrangements warrant the Government's attention because:

- (a) many special school leavers were on waiting lists for vocational rehabilitation services and day training or care services. In particular, the number of leavers on the waiting list for day training or care services has increased by 31 (53%) from 59 in 2013/14 to 90 in 2017/18 (see Table 16 in para. 4.25); and
- (b) EDB considered that the three valid reasons should cover most of the situations for allowing special school students to extend their years of study. However, many students had their years of study extended by schools after their difficulties in school leaving arrangements were taken into account as one of the factors (see Table 17 in para. 4.26). This might defeat the original purpose of implementing the measures on extension of years of study for special schools.

Audit noted that since October 2017, EDB, SWD, HKSSC and the Vocational Training Council have met annually to exchange views and information of post-school places for special school students. Audit considers that EDB and SWD need to, in collaboration with other stakeholders, provide more assistance to special school students in their school leaving arrangements.

Audit recommendation

4.28 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education and the Director of Social Welfare should, in collaboration with other stakeholders, provide more assistance to special school students in their school leaving arrangements.**

Response from the Government

4.29 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation. He has said that EDB will work with SWD in accordance with the audit recommendation.

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4.30 The Director of Social Welfare agrees with the audit recommendation. He has said that SWD will continue to:

- (a) join EDB to strengthen the support for special school students on their school leaving arrangements through the annual meeting convened by EDB;
- (b) increase around 1,900 places of Day Activity Centre and Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centre from financial year 2019-20 to 2023-24; and
- (c) review and project the future demand for rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities, including special school leavers, through devising population-related planning ratios for long-term residential care and community care services.

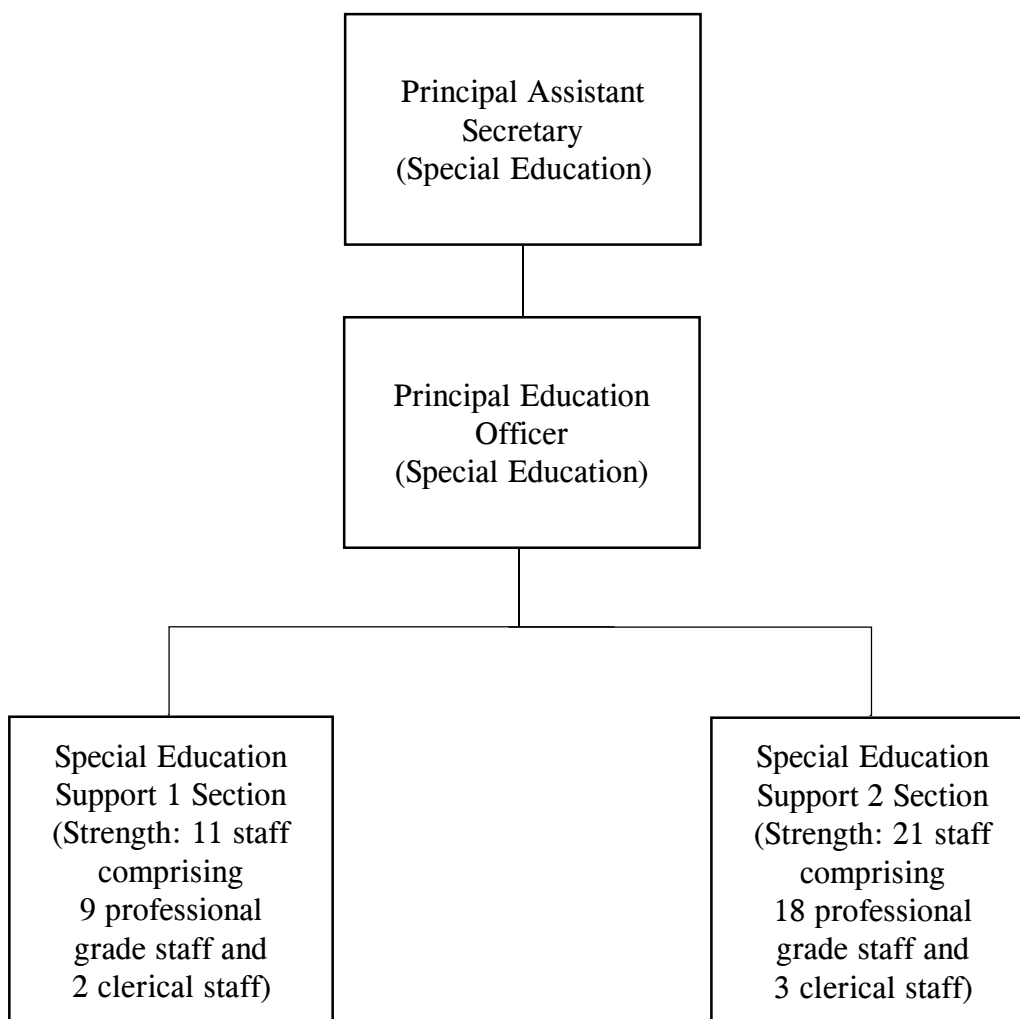
**Teacher-to-student ratios for special schools
(2018/19)**

School type	Teacher-to-student ratio (Note)
School for children with VI	1:2.6
School for children with HI	1:2.5
School for children with PD	1:4.0
School for children with ID	
— MiID	1:5.4
— MoID	1:3.7
— SID	1:3.4
SSD	1:3.2
Hospital School	1:4.3

Source: EDB records

Note: Teacher-to-student ratio is calculated based on the total number of teachers in the establishment and the actual number of students admitted to schools.

**EDB's Special Education Division:
Organisation chart (extract)
(30 June 2019)**



Source: EDB records

Remarks: Apart from the above two Special Education Support Sections responsible for special education services, the Special Education Division had another two Special Education Support Sections responsible for the implementation of integrated education. The Division also had five Educational Psychology Service Sections, a Speech and Hearing Services Section, and an Administration Section.

Acronyms and abbreviations

Audit	Audit Commission
BAT	Basic, Advanced and Thematic
CCRM	Central Co-ordinating Referral Mechanism
CCSP	Children with Medical Complexity Community Support Programme
COR	Controlling Officer's Report
DH	Department of Health
EDB	Education Bureau
F&E	Furniture and equipment
HA	Hospital Authority
HI	Hearing impairment
HKSSC	Hong Kong Special Schools Council
ID	Intellectual disability
MC	Medical complexity
MiID	Mild intellectual disability
MoID	Moderate intellectual disability
OT	Occupational therapist
PD	Physical disability
PT	Physiotherapist
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SET	Special education training
SID	Severe intellectual disability
SSD	School for social development
SWD	Social Welfare Department
TCSST	Training Course for Special School Teachers
TMS	Tripartite Model of Support
UGC	University Grants Committee
VI	Visual impairment