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To: Supervisors/Heads of Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) Secondary Schools

Dear Sir/Madam,

Operation of Non-local Curriculum in DSS Secondary Schools

This letter aims to provide updated guidelines regarding the operation of non-local curriculum in DSS secondary schools. This letter supersedes the circular letter issued by the Education Bureau (EDB) dated 29 November 2019 on the same subject.

DSS schools as local schools

DSS schools receive recurrent subsidies from the Government and their operation, including curriculum design, is therefore subject to the requirements as set out by the Government. Under the existing policy, schools admitted into the DSS have to be operated as local schools, and are required to offer principally the local curriculum targeted at local students and prepare them for local examination(s) and articulation to local universities / tertiary institutions.

Levels and maximum number of students allowed to take non-local curriculum

DSS schools should enable students to explore and develop their interests in the

local senior secondary curriculum at Secondary 4 (S4) and offer the four senior secondary core subjects (i.e. Chinese Language, English Language, Mathematics, and Citizenship and Social Development) to all students. The EDB has no objection to DSS schools to offer a small stream of non-local curriculum in parallel with the local curriculum only at the senior forms, viz. Secondary 5 (S5) and Secondary 6 (S6), as an additional curriculum choice for students on top of the local curriculum. Specifically, the maximum number of students taking non-local curriculum should not exceed one third of the students enrolled at each of the S5 and S6 levels; or a specified number of students; or a maximum percentage of total enrolment of students in the non-local curriculum stream as approved by the EDB. The cohort of students eligible for DSS subsidy at S5 level in the September headcount can be used as the basis for determining the maximum number of eligible places in the non-local curriculum programme for DSS subsidy throughout their two years of study in the same programme, provided that the school does not subsequently admit outside students to the non-local curriculum class(es) concerned.

Chinese Language as a core subject in non-local curriculum

Chinese Language should be offered as a core language subject to be in line with the biliterate and trilingual language policy. Chinese Language should be one of the core subjects that are compulsory throughout the six years of secondary curriculum, including the non-local curriculum. As such,

- All students in DSS schools should take Chinese Language irrespective of students' ethnic origins¹;
- In special situations, schools may provide school-based Chinese Language programmes² to cater for the specific educational needs of some of their students. Nonetheless, the total number of guided lesson hours of the school-based programmes should be comparable to, or at least not much smaller than, that specified for the Chinese Language subject in the non-local or local curriculum; and
- Students taking Chinese Language under the respective non-local curriculum should be suitably given exposure to Chinese Literature, classics, culture, moral and values. Enhancement modules could be offered to the more able students taking the non-local curriculum.

¹ Owing to reasons acceptable to individual schools, students may choose not to sit for the respective public examination after pursuing the Chinese Language course.

² Schools can make reference to the Chinese Language syllabus of the local and /or other non-local curriculum.

Types of non-local curriculum to be offered

The non-local curriculum to be operated should prepare students for international examination / assessment, and articulation to local and overseas universities / tertiary institutions and / or for career development. The school which applies to offer a non-local curriculum other than International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) or General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A-Level) should provide evidence to show their meeting the following main criteria for approval:

- It should be a non-local curriculum educational programme, primarily aiming at students of 16 to 18 years old, providing an alternative pathway for further studies other than the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination programme;
- Such non-local curriculum will prepare students for international examinations / assessments, and facilitate their articulation to local and overseas universities / tertiary institutions; and
- The public examination / assessment results to be obtained under the non-local programmes should be internationally recognized as equivalent to academic standards for admission to overseas universities / tertiary institutions worldwide and local universities / institutions (including UGC-funded universities), and / or for work in future.

Other points to note

DSS schools should take note of the following:

- Before making application, schools should carefully assess their own readiness and capability in offering both local and non-local curricula at the same time so as to ensure that the quality of education service would not be undermined;
- No additional Government subsidies or additional classes will be provided for offering the non-local curriculum; and schools should ensure that there is no cross-subsidization between the local curriculum and non-local curriculum. The operation of non-local curriculum should not impose undue pressure on school fees. The proposed school fee of the non-local curriculum stream should be reasonable in terms of long-term planning and sustainability. In this regard, schools should provide sound justifications on their financial situations for proposing school fees for students taking the local curriculum or non-local curriculum. School funds should be fairly distributed in the interest of all students in the school and the local curriculum should not be undermined;

- Students taking non-local curriculum are entitled to the DSS subsidy as long as they are local students as prescribed by the EDB. School fees from students taking local curriculum and students taking non-local curriculum will form the basis for the computation of the provision of school fee remission and scholarship. As such, students taking non-local curriculum are also entitled to school fee remission and scholarship;
- Parents should be fully briefed on the details of the non-local curriculum, including curriculum design, streaming arrangements, admission criteria to local universities / tertiary institutions, differentiated fees, etc. Schools should adequately address parents' possible concerns on the above;
- Formal approvals can be granted only after schools' obtaining authorization from the relevant awarding organizations. For example, IBDP requires authorization from the International Baccalaureate Organization whereas GCE A-Level requires authorization from Edexcel International / Cambridge International Examinations;
- Schools are reminded not to stage publicity or commit students for admission to the non-local curriculum programmes prior to receipt of formal approvals from the EDB for their operation; and
- Regardless of students taking the local or non-local curriculum, schools should implement national education and national security education in order to nurture in students an affection for the country, strengthen their sense of national identity and promote civic education through life-wide learning activities inside and outside classroom.

Any DSS school which intends to offer a non-local curriculum programme is required to submit an application to its respective Regional Education Office for consideration at least 18 months before the proposed effective date of operation of the programme.

Should you have any enquiry, please contact your respective Senior School Development Officer.

Yours sincerely,



(Raymond CHEUNG)
for Secretary for Education