

25 May 2023

Education Bureau Circular No. 5/2023
Grant for the Sister School Scheme

[Note: This circular should be read by

- (i) Supervisors and Heads of all Government, Aided (including special schools), Caput and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) Schools – for action; and
- (ii) Heads of Sections – for information.]

Summary

This circular informs all public sector schools¹ and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools of the latest arrangements of the Grant for the Sister School Scheme (the Grant), and encourages schools to join the Sister School Scheme (the Scheme) and apply for the Grant. This circular supersedes the Education Bureau (EDB) Circular No. 9/2018 issued on 15 June 2018.

Background

2. The Scheme, launched since 2004, has served as a platform for professional interflows and cooperation for Hong Kong primary, secondary and special schools. We have been encouraging schools to arrange various exchange activities with their sister schools in the Mainland in light of their development needs at various levels including students, teachers, and school management. For instance, students have deepened their understanding of the Mainland/Hong Kong and enhanced their friendship through mutual sister school visits and joint participation in cultural, arts and sports activities, etc. Both teachers in Hong Kong and the Mainland have fostered their professional development through activities such as collaborative lesson preparation, teaching demonstration and experience sharing. With the

¹ Public sector schools comprise government, aided and caput schools.

concerted efforts of all parties, the education sector generally considers that the Scheme is effective in facilitating the development of both Hong Kong and Mainland schools, enhancing teachers' professionalism and broadening students' horizons.

3. To promote the continuous and multi-faceted development of sister school activities, since the 2018/19 school year, EDB has been providing a recurrent grant to local public sector schools and DSS schools (including special schools) that have formed sister schools with their counterparts in the Mainland, with a view to further strengthening our support to local schools on planning and conducting exchange activities with their sister schools in the Mainland. Apart from the provision of financial resources, EDB commissions service contractors to provide schools with professional support, including organising various exchange activities on different themes and sharing sessions, offering advice on exchange activities, facilitating schools to organise exchange activities, collecting and disseminating good practices, etc.

4. To further promote mutual exchanges between Hong Kong and Mainland schools, the Chief Executive in his 2022 Policy Address announced the expansion of the network of sister schools in Hong Kong. EDB will continue to actively encourage local schools to form sister schools with their counterparts in the Mainland through various means. Besides, we will enhance the arrangements of the Grant with effect from the 2023/24 school year to enable schools to make good use of the Grant, expand the modes of exchanges among sister schools and further the effectiveness of the Scheme.

Details of Grant

Latest Arrangements

5. Currently, local public sector and DSS primary, secondary and special schools having formed sister schools with their counterparts **of the same level** in the Mainland, either through the coordination of EDB or on their own initiative, can apply for the Grant. Under the latest arrangements of the Grant, **starting from the 2023/24 school year, the above-mentioned local schools that have formed sister schools with their counterparts of different levels (including primary, secondary and special schools) in the Mainland are also eligible for applying for the Grant.** Through the relaxation on the eligibility criterion for the Grant, we expect that schools can utilise the Grant to initiate exchanges with different levels of schools in the Mainland so as to engage in professional discussions and diversified collaborations from more perspectives and at deeper levels, through which schools in both Hong Kong and the Mainland can gain a deep understanding on areas including interface between different stages

of education, the academic structure for further studies, etc. Schools can also draw on the successful experiences of sister schools of different levels for inspirations and new opportunities on school development, with a view to bringing greater benefits to both teachers and students.

Amount of Grant

6. The amount of the Grant for each local school for the 2022/23 school year is \$159,955. It will be adjusted in accordance with the movement of the Composite Consumer Price Index each year.

Usage of Grant

7. Schools may use the Grant to arrange different modes of exchange activities having regard to their specific circumstances². As the Grant is a designated funding, schools shall use the Grant to meet the expenses of sister school exchange activities and relevant support relating to the objectives mentioned in paragraphs 2 to 5. **Schools should make use of other grants/resources to cover all the expenses not related to sister school exchange activities.** If found inadequate, schools may use the Grant in tandem with other government funding, including the surplus under the Operating Expenses Block Grant (OEBG)/Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant (EOEBG) (for aided schools), DSS Subsidy (for DSS schools) and fee subsidy (for caput schools). Any deficit should be met by schools' own fund/non-government fund. Government schools may deploy the surplus of the Expanded Subject and Curriculum Block Grant (ESCBG) to cover the deficit if required. Points to note regarding the usage of the Grant are at **Annex 1**.

Funding Disbursement Arrangements

8. The Grant is separated from OEBG or EOEBG. Upon approval of the Grant, the Grant will be allocated to aided, caput and DSS schools at two points in the school year (i.e. in September and April). For government schools, the Grant will be allocated in the form of budget allocations at two points in the school year (i.e. in September and April); separate allocation for the unspent balance (if any) of the preceding financial year will be provided at the beginning of the next financial year.

² Schools should adhere to the principles stipulated in EDB's "Guidelines on Study Tours outside Hong Kong" when arranging and conducting sister school exchange activities in the Mainland.

Accounting Arrangements

9. Schools are required to observe the established principles and requirements on the use of public funds as promulgated by EDB when using the Grant. These include, among others, procurement of stores/services according to fair and transparent procedures, preparation of a separate ledger for proper recording of accounting transactions. Aided, caput and DSS schools are required to keep a separate ledger account to record all the incomes and expenditures chargeable to the Grant and submit the annual audited accounts to EDB for examination in accordance with the existing requirements. Transfer of funds out of this Grant is not allowed. For government schools, the Grant is provided in the form of budget allocation and should be charged to the user code assigned. The Grant is financial year-based and the expenditure could not exceed the allocation in the respective financial year. Schools are also required to pay attention to the prevailing ordinances, regulations and circulars related to procurement of outside services and handling of accounts, etc. Transfer of funds out of this Grant is not allowed.

Surplus Retention and Claw back Arrangements

10. Since the Grant is a recurrent grant, schools are required to optimise its use for the respective school year. Hence, schools are, in principle, not expected to retain surplus of this Grant. Nevertheless, we understand that the sister school activities are organised by both Hong Kong and Mainland schools and some schools may have cogent reasons for not following the original plan to use their funding within the school/financial year under unforeseen circumstances. We thus allow schools to retain a reasonable amount of unspent balance in a school/financial year and carry it forward for use in the subsequent year as detailed in the paragraphs below.

11. For aided, DSS and caput schools, we allow schools to retain a maximum amount of unspent balance of up to twelve (12) months' provision of the Grant. EDB will claw back any amount in excess of the said cap based on schools' annual audited accounts. Transfer of funds/ unspent balance out of this Grant is not allowed.

12. Government schools basically have the same arrangement as for aided, DSS and caput schools, except that they are accounted for on a financial year basis and any unspent balance in excess of the cap will lapse at the end of the relevant financial year.

Accountability

13. The Incorporated Management Committee (IMC)/ School Management Committee (SMC) of the school is accountable for the proper use of the Grant for its intended objectives. Schools are required to prepare a Plan on Sister School Exchanges in each school year which is to be **incorporated in the Annual School Plan** for endorsement by their IMC/SMC, setting out the objectives and the outline of the sister school exchanges, the arrangement of the Grant usage, etc. Exchanges should, in principle, be carried out without affecting regular teaching and school activities. Schools should also report the details of the sister school exchanges held and the financial report **in the School Report** for submission and endorsement by their IMC/SMC. Schools are **not** required to submit the Plan and Report on Sister School Exchanges to EDB. However, schools are required to upload the **Annual School Plan and School Report** (which consist of the Plan and Report on Sister School Exchanges respectively) endorsed by their IMC/SMC onto the homepage of the school for the sake of enhancing transparency and in accordance with the established practice. Templates of the Plan and Report on Sister School Exchanges (full version and simplified version) have been uploaded onto “Sister School Scheme” webpage on EDB website for schools’ reference (<https://www.edb.gov.hk>) **【Home >School Administration and Management >Administration >About School >Sister School Scheme】**. Schools can adopt the templates as needed or compile their own Plan and Report on Sister School Exchanges to suit their specific school-based circumstances.

Application Procedures

14. Schools intending to apply for the Grant for the first time should complete the **Grant for the Sister School Scheme Application Form (Annex 2)**. Should schools

- have paired up with Mainland schools as sister schools on their own initiative, please **also** complete the **Reporting Form on Mainland Sister Schools (Annex 3)** together with **copies of relevant supporting documents**
- have not paired up with any sister schools in the Mainland yet and wish to do so through the coordination of EDB, please **also** complete the **Indication of Preference for Pairing Up with Mainland Schools (Annex 4)**

15. If schools have already formed sister schools with their counterparts of different levels (including primary, secondary and special schools) in the Mainland on their own initiative, please complete and submit the **Reporting Form on Mainland Sister Schools**

(Annex 3) together with copies of relevant supporting documents to EDB **on or before 14 July 2023 (Friday)** to ensure schools can receive/utilise the Grant to engage in exchanges with the respective sister schools from the 2023/24 school year onwards. If the above schools have not yet applied for the Grant, they should submit the **Grant for the Sister School Scheme Application Form (Annex 2)** to EDB **at the same time**.

16. Schools should submit the above documents **by post** to the School Development Support Section, EDB, 5/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong. Alternatively, schools can complete the electronic form(s) **via the Common Log-On System** (<https://clo.edb.gov.hk/>). **Schools applying for the Grant for the first time should submit their applications on or before 15 July/15 February of each year.** Schools may not be able to receive the Grant in September of the next school year/April of the current school year if they submit applications late. They only need to submit the application form once. **Once approved, annual application is not required thereafter.**

17. In order to have a general picture on the Hong Kong-Mainland sister school pairs, schools should submit the **Reporting Form on Mainland Sister Schools (Annex 3)** together with **copies of relevant supporting documents** to EDB if they have paired up with their Mainland counterparts on their own initiative subsequently. On the other hand, schools that wish to pair up with more sister schools through the coordination of EDB in future should complete and submit the **Indication of Preference for Pairing Up with Mainland Schools (Annex 4)** to EDB.

Enquiry

18. For enquiries, please contact the School Development Support Section of EDB at 3509 8464 or 3509 8482.

(Dr Verena LAU)
for Permanent Secretary for Education

Points to Note

Usage of the Grant for the Sister School Scheme

Schools should ensure that expenditures incurred are reasonable and necessary for educational purposes in a cost-effective manner when using the Grant for the Sister School Scheme. In the event that expenditure is found improperly charged, EDB shall request the school concerned to explain the anomalies. In the absence of acceptable explanation, the school should make good such expenditure by charging it to other suitable resources. Besides, schools should have established their own school-based mechanism to handle the arrangement for the Grant, e.g. the arrangement of tour fee for the students who have been approved to join sister school exchange activities but subsequently request to withdraw.

Examples of appropriate use of the Grant

- expenses on package tour service incurred by school management, teachers and students for visiting Mainland sister schools
- cost of procuring services or hiring temporary supporting staff for handling relevant administrative work (*including all expenditures related to the employment, e.g. salaries, expenses arising from leave and statutory benefits such as Mandatory Provident Fund, etc., the annual total expenditure should not exceed 20% of the Grant for that school year*)
- expenses on activities jointly organised by sister schools and related expenses incurred in Hong Kong
- cost for video-conferencing facilities
- expenses on breakfasts/lunches/dinners of school principal and teachers in relation to their discharge of duties in sister school activities (*Schools are required to avoid lavishness and to make conscientious decision in providing such expenses. Schools should make reference to the limits of such expenses per occasion and per head quoted in the “Expanded Operating Expenses Block Grant User Guide for Aided Schools which have established an Incorporated Management Committee”/“Operating Expenses Block Grant User Guide for Aided Schools”. The IMC/SMC is required to provide full justifications if the expenses exceed the limits quoted.*)
- expenses on refreshments for exchange activities taking place in Hong Kong (*the annual total expenditure should not exceed 2% of the Grant for that school year*)
- expenses on the single entry visa for teachers participating in Mainland sister school

exchanges (*the annual total expenditure should not exceed 1% of the Grant for that school year*)

Examples of inappropriate use of the Grant

- the travelling, boarding and lodging expenses for the school personnel and students of Mainland sister schools on their visits to Hong Kong
- personal items and expenses
- expenses on students' visas
- purchasing **personal** and/or travel insurance for teachers and students participating in sister school exchange activities
- employing supply teachers
- protocol related expenses (e.g. crystal souvenirs, pennants etc.)

The above examples are for reference only and are non-exhaustive.

Please return the completed Application Form **by post** to the School Development Support Section, Education Bureau.
 (Address: 5/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong)
 (Note: Please ensure that sufficient postage is paid to avoid unsuccessful delivery of mails.
 Any underpaid mail items will be disposed of by the Hong Kong Post.)

Grant for the Sister School Scheme Application Form

To: Permanent Secretary for Education
 [Attn: Senior Education Officer (School Development Support) 1]

Endorsed by our **Incorporated Management Committee (IMC) /School Management Committee (SMC)***, our school now applies for the Grant for the Sister School Scheme. The information of our school is as follows: *(Please put a tick (✓) in the box as appropriate.)*

Name of School: _____

School Type: Secondary Primary Special

Finance Type: Government Aided DSS Caput

School Address: _____

School Telephone No. and Fax No.: Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

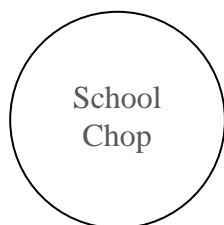
School Email address: _____

Name of Principal: _____

Name and Post of Teacher-in-charge of _____

Sister School/ the E-platform³: Vice-principal/senior teacher/teacher/others*(Please specify): _____

- Our school has joined **the Sister School Scheme**.
- Our school has not joined the Sister School Scheme yet, but has already paired up with Mainland schools as sister schools *(Please also submit **Annex 3**)*.
- Our school has no sister school in the Mainland and would like to pair up with Mainland schools as sister schools through the coordination of EDB *(Please also submit **Annex 4**)*.



Signature of Supervisor/SMC Chairman* : _____

Name of Supervisor/SMC Chairman* : _____

Date: _____

* Please delete as appropriate

³ E-platform refers to the Electronic Platform for Sister Schools set up by EDB. EDB will contact the teacher-in-charge in due course about the creation of a user account. *(Only applicable to those schools that have no user account.)*

Please return the completed Reporting Form **by post** to the School Development Support Section, Education Bureau.
 (Address: 5/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong)
*(Note: Please ensure that sufficient postage is paid to avoid unsuccessful delivery of mails.
 Any underpaid mail items will be disposed of by the Hong Kong Post.)*

Sister School Scheme
Reporting Form on Mainland Sister Schools
 (Only applicable to those sister school pairs not reported to EDB before)

To: Permanent Secretary for Education
 [Attn: Senior Education Officer (School Development Support) 1]

We have joined/have not joined * the Sister School Scheme and have paired up/newly paired up* with Mainland schools as sister schools. Details are as follows: *(Please attach copies of relevant supporting documents. If there are more than two sister schools, please use a separate sheet to provide the information.)*

Name of Sister School (1) :

School Type :

Secondary/Primary/Special*

Year of Forming Sister School:

Location of Sister School:

Province

City

Area

Name of Sister School (2) :

School Type :

Secondary/Primary/Special*

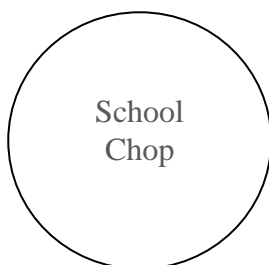
Year of Forming Sister School:

Location of Sister School:

Province

City

Area



Signature of Supervisor/SMC

Chairman/Principal* :

Name of Supervisor/SMC

Chairman/Principal* :

Name of Teacher-in-charge :

Name of School :

School Level : Secondary/ Primary/ Special*

School Telephone No.:

Date:

* Please delete as appropriate.

Please return the completed Indication of Preference **by post** to the School Development Support Section, Education Bureau.
 (Address: 5/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong)
 (Note: Please ensure that sufficient postage is paid to avoid unsuccessful delivery of mails.
 Any underpaid mail items will be disposed of by the Hong Kong Post.)

Sister School Scheme
Indication of Preference for Pairing Up with Mainland Schools

To: Permanent Secretary for Education
 [Attn: Senior Education Officer (School Development Support) 1]

We would like to form sister school pair(s) through the coordination of EDB. Our preference is as follows:
 (Please put a tick (✓) in the box as appropriate.)

Part A: Location

- Forming sister school pair(s) according to the preference below. (Please put down the preference from 1 to 8 in the boxes below.)

Location	Bay Area#	Sichuan Province	Hainan Province	Shanghai Municipality	Beijing Municipality	Fujian Province	Cities in other Guangdong Province (Please specify)	Other provinces/cities (Please specify)
Preference								

#refers to Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Huizhou, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Jiangmen and Zhaoqing

Cities in other Guangdong provinces (Please specify: _____)

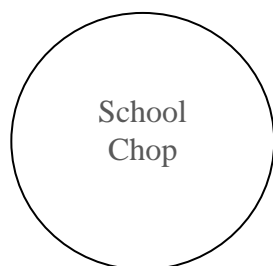
Other provinces and cities (Please specify: _____)

- Any provinces or cities arranged by EDB

Part B: School Characteristics

- school in remote area experimental school foreign language school vocational education
 technology education sports arts
 subject area (please specify: _____)
 others (please specify: _____)
 no specific choice

We understand that the preferences indicated above are used as reference for pairing only and the final result of pairing is subject to the actual circumstances. Should we have very special reasons for not pairing up with the school arranged by EDB, we will inform and explain to EDB in writing.



Signature of Supervisor/SMC Chairman* : _____

Name of Supervisor/SMC Chairman* : _____

Name of Teacher-in-charge : _____

Name of School : _____

School Level : Secondary/ Primary/ Special* _____

School Telephone No.: _____

* Please delete as appropriate.

Date: _____

Sister School Scheme

Personal Information Collection Statement

Purpose of Collection

1. The personal data provided by you in this form will be used by EDB for one or more of the following purposes:
 - (a) Activities relating to the processing, authentication and counter-checking of the application or form related to the Sister School Scheme;
 - (b) Activities relating to assisting schools in pairing up with Mainland schools as sister schools;
 - (c) Activities relating to matching of the personal data with the database of other relevant Government bureaux / departments in connection with the processing, authentication and counter-checking of the application or form mentioned in (a) & (b) above;
 - (d) Activities relating to matching of the personal data within the database of EDB for purposes of verifying / updating records of EDB;
 - (e) Activities relating to training and development including invitation of participation in programmes/activities, applications for reimbursement of course fees, assessment of nominations, awards and scholarship, and monitoring of attainment progress;
 - (f) Activities relating to the processing and vetting of applications for, and disbursement of, funding / grants / subsidies, and conducting of audits;
 - (g) Activities relating to compilation of statistics, research and Government publications; and
 - (h) Activities relating to the administration and enforcement of rules and regulations including the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279), its subsidiary legislation (such as the Education Regulations and the Grant/Subsidised Schools Provident Fund Rules) and the Codes of Aid.
2. The provision of personal data required by this form and during the processing of this form is obligatory. In the event that you do not provide those personal data, we may not be able to handle or further process the application or form.

Classes of Transferees

3. The personal data you provide will be made available to persons working in EDB. Apart from this, they may be transferred or disclosed to the parties or in the circumstances listed below:-
- (a) other Government bureaux and departments for the purposes mentioned in paragraph 1 above;
 - (b) the school in which the form relates for the purposes mentioned in paragraph 1 above;
 - (c) the service contractors commissioned by EDB for the purposes mentioned in paragraph 1 above;
 - (d) relevant government departments in the Mainland for the purposes mentioned in paragraph 1 above;
 - (e) where you have given your prescribed consent to such disclosure; and
 - (f) where such disclosure is authorised or required under the law or court order applicable to Hong Kong.

Access to Personal Data

4. You have the right to request access to and correction of your personal data held by EDB. Request for access or correction of personal data should be made in writing to Senior Education Officer (School Development Support) 1 at 5/F, East Wing, Central Government Offices, 2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong or email to seods1@edb.gov.hk.