

Community Care Fund Assistance Programme
Extra travel subsidy for needy special school students
Evaluation Report

Background

To provide enhanced support for needy special school students to meet their daily basic travelling expenses to and from school, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) approved in May 2013 to launch the Community Care Fund (CCF) programme of providing extra travel subsidy for needy special school students (the Programme) in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years.

2. Target beneficiaries of the Programme are primary one to secondary six students from special schools for the physically disabled, visually impaired, hearing impaired and the mildly, moderately and severely intellectually disabled who are eligible¹ for full or half level of assistance under the means-tested Student Travel Subsidy (STS) Scheme administered by the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency. Based on the existing operation of the STS Scheme, the SFO disburses to each eligible student an extra 50% of travel subsidy on top of the STS they receive.

3. The Programme was rolled out by the SFO in October 2013. With an estimated expenditure amounting to \$3.64 million (including \$0.13 million of administrative cost) for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years, about 1 720 students are expected to benefit from the Programme in each school year.

Implementation of the Programme

4. The SFO started to disburse the subsidy to eligible applicants in

¹ An applicant residing at a place beyond 10 minutes' walking distance from school during term time and travelling to and from school by public transport is, subject to a means test, eligible for STS. He/She may receive full rate or half rate of travel subsidy for home-school travels, depending on his/her family's actual financial situation.

October 2013. No separate application for the extra travel subsidy is required. The extra subsidy is disbursed to eligible applicants together with the STS automatically and credited to their bank accounts through auto-transfer. For the information of applicants, the SFO uploads details of the extra travel subsidy onto its website, notifies the applicants of the auto-transfer transactions in writing or via text messages after disbursement. The SFO has provided the extra travel subsidy to 1 736 and 1 667 primary and secondary students from special schools for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years (as at end January 2015) respectively, with the disbursement involved amounting to about \$3.29 million (see Appendix I).

Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness

5. The SFO has evaluated the effectiveness of the Programme. The evaluation results and the arrangement on regularisation of the Programme were reported to the CoP at its meeting in July 2015. The details and findings of the evaluation are as follows:

(i) Extra travel subsidy as support for low-income families

6. At present, subject to professional assessments and recommendations as well as parental consent, the Education Bureau (EDB) places students with severe or multiple disabilities in special schools. Unlike ordinary students, the majority of special school students are unable to travel to school by public transport due to physical limitations or safety concerns. Consequently, they have to take rehabilitation buses or other non-public modes of transport, including school buses. Rehabilitation buses, which serve not only students, have limited seating capacity and are restricted in service flexibility. Some disabled students, including the mildly and moderately intellectually disabled students as well as the hearing impaired students, are not eligible for rehabilitation bus service. Thus, many special school students have to take non-public modes of transport to and from school, incurring higher transport fees. Since the amount of STS is calculated on the basis

of the fee level of public transport, the annual transport expenses incurred by needy students from special schools for home-school travels are often higher than the STS they receive. The extra travel subsidy provided for eligible students of special schools on top of the STS can no doubt strengthen the support for low-income families.

(ii) Survey among beneficiaries

7. To gauge stakeholders' views on the effectiveness of the Programme, the SFO conducted a questionnaire survey among parents of 920 primary and secondary student beneficiaries between November and December 2014. According to the findings, about 98% of the respondents agreed that the Programme could help alleviate their burden for children's school-related expenses, about 98% were satisfied with the operational arrangements of the Programme, and about 99% concurred that the Programme should be continued. In the survey, almost all the respondents mentioned that the extra subsidy gave them substantive help and should be provided on a continuous basis. More details about the survey are given at Appendix II.

(iii) Implementation mode of the Programme

8. The Programme operates under an existing mechanism with the extra travel subsidy disbursed to needy students from special schools through the SFO. The SFO considers that such an arrangement is operating well in that apart from minimising cost and administrative work, it enables the disbursement of extra travel subsidy to eligible persons within the shortest span of time. Moreover, separate applications are not required for the convenience of the applicants.

Conclusion

9. According to the above evaluation and the survey findings, the vast majority of the parents surveyed agreed that the Programme was generally effective in alleviating their burden for children's school-related

expenses, and they were satisfied with the operational arrangements. They indicated that the Programme should be implemented on a continuous basis. They also expressed that it was appropriate for the Programme to be implemented by the SFO. This shows that the Programme can meet the purpose for which it was launched as well as the objective of the CCF to render appropriate assistance to people facing economic difficulties.

Regularisation of the Programme

10. In light of the effectiveness of the Programme and the beneficiaries' expectation of its continued implementation, the Government has announced that starting from the 2015/16 school year, the Programme would be incorporated into its regular assistance programmes and the necessary provision has been earmarked in the estimates of the 2015-16 budget to meet the expenses.

11. Upon regularisation of the Programme, subsidy will be disbursed to needy special school students through the STS Scheme of the SFO. Disbursement will be made to parents of eligible students in October each year at the earliest to provide them with appropriate support. Since the Programme will be implemented under the existing mechanism, the SFO does not need to augment their manpower. Upon regularisation of the Programme in the 2015/16 school year, it is estimated that about 1 700 eligible and needy primary and secondary students from special schools will benefit each year.

Education Bureau

May 2015

**Number of student beneficiaries of the extra travel subsidy and
amount of subsidy disbursed**

	No. of beneficiaries	Amount disbursed
2013/14	1 736 persons	\$1.66 million
2014/15 (as at end January 2015)	1 667 persons	\$1.63 million
Total	3 403 persons	\$3.29 million

Survey among beneficiaries of extra travel subsidy

Respondents' satisfaction level and views about the assistance programme

Questions and views	No. of respondents	Percentage
1. Do you agree that this assistance programme has alleviated your burden for children's school-related expenses? - Agree - Disagree - No comment	898 21 1	97.6% 2.3% 0.1%
2. Generally speaking, are you satisfied with the arrangements of this assistance programme? - Satisfied - Not satisfied - No comment	898 20 2	97.6% 2.2% 0.2%
3. Do you think this assistance programme, which was implemented in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years, should be continued? - Yes - No - No comment	912 7 1	99.1% 0.8% 0.1%

4. Do you have any other comments on this assistance programme?		
- No	877	95%
- Yes (including the following views)	43	5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of assistance should be raised. (26) • The Programme should be implemented on a continuous basis. (8) • Travel subsidy should be calculated on the basis of the actual amount of travelling expenses incurred. (3) • Subsidy should be provided to cover travelling expenses of parents. (1) • Questions concerning bank transaction legends (2) • No reasons given (3) 		