



PRESS RELEASE

Ministry of Education

3 AUGUST 2007

Special and Express Courses at Secondary Schools to Merge

1. Starting from the Secondary One students in 2008, the Special and Express Courses will be merged into the “Express Course”. This is in recognition of the diminishing differences between the Special and Express Courses, following the relaxation of the eligibility criteria for students to offer Higher Mother Tongue Language (HMTL). The merger will not affect the status of Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools.

EVOLUTION OF SPECIAL COURSE

2. The Special Course was first introduced in 1979 to demarcate a distinct course taken by students:

- a. Who were in the top 10 percent of the PSLE cohort; and
- b. Who took Higher Chinese Language (HCL) in the SAP schools.

3. The Special Course has evolved and since 1986, it no longer refers to the Course offered by students in the SAP schools. In 1986, the Special Course was expanded to include students in the top 10 percent of the PSLE cohort who offer HMTL (i.e. Higher Chinese, Higher Malay and Higher Tamil) in secondary schools, regardless of whether they are in SAP schools. Today, 51% of Special Course students are in SAP schools, while 49% are in non-SAP schools.

SPECIAL AND EXPRESS COURSES HAVE BECOME MORE SIMILAR

4. In recent years, the differences between the Special and Express Courses have become even smaller. This is due to the progressive changes to the eligibility criteria for students to offer HMTL at ‘O’ levels, to allow more students to offer HMTL if they have the ability and interest to do so:

- Prior to 1995, only students in the top 10 percent of the PSLE cohort could offer HMTL in secondary schools. In 1995, students in the top 11-20 percent were allowed to offer HMTL, if they obtained an A* in MTL or Distinction in HMTL, and at least an A in English Language (EL).

- In 1999, the rule was further reviewed to allow students in the top 30 percent of the PSLE cohort to offer HMTL at secondary level, if they have an A* in MTL or Distinction in HMTL, and at least an A in EL.
- From 2004, the requirement to have at least an A in EL was removed, and schools were also given the flexibility to allow students who do not meet the formal criteria to offer HMTL, if the teachers assessed that they are able to do HMTL without affecting their performance in other subjects.

5. Therefore, since 1995, an increasing number of students from the Express Course have been offering HMTL. The number of Secondary 1 Express Course students offering HMTL has increased from 862 in 1995 to 4,466 in 2007. For the 2007 Secondary 1 cohort, there are 4,466 Express Course students and 4,410 Special Course students offering HMTL.

6. In addition, some schools have placed Special and Express Course students in the same classes. Thus, there is now little distinction between Special and Express students in secondary schools.

MERGER OF SPECIAL AND EXPRESS COURSES

7. To better reflect the reality in schools where there is no longer a significant distinction between the Special and Express Courses, and to give schools greater flexibility to organise their classes, MOE will merge the Special and Express Courses into the “Express Course”, starting from the Secondary One students in 2008.

8. The merger of the two courses will not change the status of SAP schools, which continue to play an important role in preserving the best traditions of Chinese medium schools and nurturing able students to study both Chinese and English at the first language level. There will be no change to the existing provisions for SAP schools, which include allowing students who are in the top 30 percent of the PSLE cohort and pass HCL to be eligible for bonus points for admission to SAP schools.

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