

Secondary School Places Allocation System 2022/2024
(For Admission to Secondary 1 in September 2024)
Frequently Asked Questions

Discretionary Places

(1) Q What are discretionary places (DP)?

A DP are Secondary 1 (S1) places reserved by secondary schools for admission of students at their own discretion. Government, aided and caput secondary schools may reserve not more than 30% of their S1 places as DP, while Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) secondary schools participating in the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System may reserve more than 30% of their S1 places as DP.

(2) Q What are the procedures of applying for a DP?

A The DP application period for this cycle is from 2 January (Tuesday) to 16 January 2024 (Tuesday). All secondary schools participating in the SSPA System (participating secondary schools) accept applications within the same period.

Parents of participating Primary 6 (P6) students of the current cycle will receive two copies of Application Form for Secondary One Discretionary Place (Application Form) through their children's primary schools in early December 2023. Students not studying in participating primary schools can obtain the Application Forms from the School Places Allocation Section of the Education Bureau (EDB) (Address: Office 2, 2/F, Manulife Financial Centre, 223 Wai Yip Street, Kwun Tong, Kowloon; Tel: 2832 7740 and 2832 7700) (Note: School Places Allocation Section is scheduled to be relocated to Podium Floor, West Block, Education Bureau Kowloon Tong Education Services Centre, 19 Suffolk Road, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon in the fourth quarter of 2023. The details will be announced on the EDB's website.) during office hours (Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 1:00pm and 2:00pm to 6:00pm; closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays) from 5 December 2023 to 16 January 2024.

Besides, in line with the "Smart Government" strategy, the EDB has implemented digitalisation of S1 admission starting from 2023. For parents registered as SSPA e-Platform users and bound their account with "iAM Smart+"¹, apart from the paper Application Form, they may submit DP applications via the SSPA e-Platform. For details on the submission of DP applications, parents may refer to the Notes for Parents on Application for Secondary One Discretionary Places to be distributed in early December 2023.

As regards the lists of participating secondary schools, parents may refer to the Handbook for Application for Secondary One Discretionary Places (Handbook) distributed to primary schools in early December 2023. Parents may also visit the EDB's Homepage (www.edb.gov.hk) (Select: Home > Education System and Policy > Primary and Secondary Education > School Places Allocation Systems > Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System) to download the lists or call the EDB's 24-hour Automatic Telephone Enquiry System at 2891 0088 (Press 2 (English) > 5 (Fax Services) > 04 (Secondary School Places Allocation System: School Lists)) to obtain the lists by fax.

¹ For details of the "iAM Smart+" registration, please visit the "iAM Smart" thematic website (www.iamsmart.gov.hk) (Select: Home > "iAM Smart" Registration > Registration Methods).

(3) Q How many secondary schools may parents apply to for their child at the DP stage? What is the consequence of making DP applications to more than two participating secondary schools?

A DP application is not subject to restriction on districts. Parents may apply to not more than two participating secondary schools for their child. Parents must note that if they apply to more than two participating secondary schools for DP, no matter whether the applications are submitted in paper form or via the SSPA e-Platform, the DP applications will be rendered void.

Of the two Application Forms received by the student/parent, one carries Order of School Preference 1 and the other carries Order of School Preference 2. Order of School Preference 1 denotes a student's first choice and Order of School Preference 2 denotes a student's second choice. Based on the unique application number each Application Form carries, the EDB will ascertain the first and second choices of each student (paper Application Form and application via the SSPA e-Platform bear the same application number for applications with the same order of school preference).

If parents have submitted an application via the SSPA e-Platform, please do not submit a duplicate application to a secondary school in paper Application Form, and vice versa. If parents submit duplicate applications (i.e. submitting applications bearing the same application number to the same secondary school in both paper form and via the SSPA e-Platform), these applications will be regarded as one application only. Hence, duplicate applications will not increase the chance of a student being allocated to the school. Please note that parents should not submit applications bearing the same application number to two different secondary schools via the SSPA e-Platform and in paper form. Otherwise, the DP applications of their child will be rendered void.

(4) Q Apart from applying to not more than two participating secondary schools, what do parents need to note when making a DP application for their children?

A Students who are successful in DP application will not be allocated a school place in Central Allocation (CA). Parents should, therefore, apply to school(s) of their preference. Parents should also note that, no matter whether the applications are submitted in paper form or via the SSPA e-Platform, the applications, once submitted, cannot be retrieved or cancelled, and no change can be made to the order of school preference. Hence, parents should make very careful consideration before submitting an application so as to make a suitable choice.

(5) Q What should be taken into consideration when parents choose a school for their children?

A Parents should consider all aspects of a school, e.g. its educational philosophy, culture, religion, class structure, development and operation, and their children’s characteristics, personalities, abilities and interests so as to make a suitable school choice.

Schools may decide on their own admission procedures, admission criteria and weightings according to their educational philosophy and characteristics. The admission criteria and weightings adopted by the school must be fair, just, open and educationally sound, and must be made public prior to the DP application period, e.g. by being displayed in a prominent place of the school, uploaded on the school’s homepage, published in the Secondary School Profile or made known to each applicant in writing. Schools may arrange interviews, but no written test in any forms should be conducted.

Parents may refer to the Secondary School Profiles distributed by the Committee on Home-School Co-operation in early December 2023, or visit the Secondary School Profiles homepage and the school’s homepage for the latest developments of the school.

(6) Q As secondary schools are not allowed to conduct written test in any forms for admission purpose, how can they assess the performance of the applicants?

A Applications will be evaluated based on the admission criteria and weightings set by the schools, e.g. the academic and non-academic performance of the students. Some schools will also make use of the interviews to learn about the applicants’ aptitude, interest and potential in order to select suitable students for admission.

(7) Q When making a DP application, what documents are required to be submitted to the secondary school applied to?

A For parents submitting the application in paper form, the documents to be submitted should include the Application Form for Secondary One Discretionary Place and the documents as required by the school concerned, e.g. students’ school report cards, records of awards or prizes, and certificates or records of extra-curricular activities and community service. Submission of information not immediately available, such as primary schools’ recommendation letters as well as scores or rank order of students in individual subjects, is not required.

Should parents submit the DP application via the SSPA e-Platform, upon choosing the preferred secondary schools in order of school preference (Order of School Preference 1 or Order of School Preference 2), they have to first upload student’s identity documents, then upload documents required by the secondary school to the corresponding folders based on the document category (for example, Completed School-based Application Form, Copies of Report Cards and Records of Certificates and Awards), and sign digitally with “iAM Smart+” for completion of application.

(8) Q What are the criteria for allocating a DP if a student has applied to two participating secondary schools and is accepted by both of them?

A Based on the unique application number each Application Form carries, the EDB will ascertain the first and second choices of each student (paper Application Form and application via the SSPA e-Platform bear the same application number for applications with the same order of school preference). The EDB will then match the students' preferences against the schools' Successful/Reserve Lists for Discretionary Places. If a student is successful in his/her applications to both of the schools to which he/she applies, allocation will be based on the student's order of preference. In other words, the student will be allocated to his/her first choice.

If parents have applied to a secondary school which eventually does not offer S1 places under the SSPA System in this allocation cycle, that application will not be processed.

(9) Q Apart from applying to not more than two participating secondary schools, can students apply to Jockey Club Ti-I College at the same time?

A Yes, they can. The application period for S1 admission to Jockey Club Ti-I College is from 2 January to 18 January 2024. If students are successful in their application to Jockey Club Ti-I College, they will not be allocated a DP or a place in CA under the SSPA System. If they are unsuccessful in their application, they can still go through the SSPA System for allocation of an S1 place.

(10) Q Can students also apply to Direct Subsidy Scheme secondary schools not participating in SSPA (NDSS secondary schools) at the same time?

A Yes, they can. As there is no limit to the number of NDSS secondary schools that a student may apply to, he/she may be accepted by several NDSS secondary schools. However, when a parent surrenders the signed Parent's Undertaking and the original of the Primary 6 Student Record Form to one of the schools making the child an offer, then that will serve as confirmation of acceptance of the S1 place offered by the NDSS secondary school concerned and an agreement to give up any other subsidised S1 places (including the S1 places of participating secondary schools and Jockey Club Ti-I College). The school will notify the EDB of the parent's decision by late April 2024. On receiving the Successful Lists of Participating Students from NDSS secondary schools, the EDB will not allocate the students on the list to other secondary schools through the SSPA System.

Arrangements for Notifying Successful DP Applicants (notification arrangements)

(11) Q What are the arrangements for notifying successful DP applicants (notification arrangements) under the SSPA System?

A Starting from SSPA 2020, all participating secondary schools (including Jockey Club Ti-I College) are required to, after processing DP applications, notify parents of all successful applicants of their children's inclusion in the Successful Lists for Discretionary Places by letter and phone on a specified date before CA². Schools are required to keep parents well-informed of the notification arrangements, and collect necessary contact information beforehand. The specified date for this SSPA cycle is 27 March 2024. For parents registered as SSPA e-Platform users, they may also view notifications for successful DP applicants via the SSPA e-Platform starting from 10 a.m. on the same day. These notification arrangements are not applicable to reserve and unsuccessful applicants, nor are the notifications of the allocation results. The parents concerned do not need to reply to the secondary schools concerned on whether they would accept the offers. Parents who receive notifications from participating secondary schools of successful applications do not need to fill out the parts on school choices on the Choice of Schools Form (Choice Form) at the CA stage which begins in April 2024.

The aforementioned notification arrangements are administrative measures. The existing SSPA mechanism and procedures remain unchanged. All students in this SSPA cycle will receive the SSPA allocation results (including results of the DP and CA stages) on 9 July 2024.

If students are studying in primary schools not participating in the SSPA System and are allocated with a school place at the DP stage, participating secondary schools or Jockey Club Ti-I College will call the parents to inform them of the official DP results and the related arrangements on 9 July 2024 (i.e. the date of announcement of the allocation results). If necessary, parents may also contact the secondary school(s) to which they have applied on 9 July 2024.

(12) Q If students have submitted DP applications to two participating secondary schools, will they be possibly notified as successful applicants by both schools respectively?

A For individual students who have submitted DP applications to two participating secondary schools and have been successful in both applications, their parents will receive notifications from two participating secondary schools respectively. The students concerned will be allocated to schools of their first choice according to the existing SSPA mechanism.

² Please refer to the EDB Circular No. 18/2019 for details of the arrangements for notifying successful discretionary places applicants and the sample notification letter.

(13) Q Under the notification arrangements, will reserve and unsuccessful applicants be notified by participating secondary schools of their application results in advance?

A Under the notification arrangements, participating secondary schools are required to notify only successful applicants of their inclusion in the schools' Successful Lists for Discretionary Places. Schools are not allowed to notify reserve and unsuccessful applicants of their DP application results to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding.

(14) Q When will reserve applicants be notified by participating secondary schools that they are allocated with DP?

A The notification arrangements are not applicable to reserve and unsuccessful applicants. All students (including reserve applicants) in this SSPA cycle will receive the official allocation results from the EDB on 9 July 2024.

(15) Q After receiving notifications from participating secondary schools, do the parents concerned have to disclose their order of school preference to the schools concerned and confirm their acceptance of the DP offered?

A According to the existing SSPA System, parents do not have to disclose their order of school preference to the schools they have applied to. The notifications from participating secondary schools to parents under the notification arrangements are not an official release of allocation results. Hence, parents do not have to disclose their order of school preference to the schools concerned, nor confirm their acceptance of the DP offered after receiving notifications of their children's successful DP applications.

(16) Q After receiving notifications from participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants, can parents change the order of school preference for their children?

A According to the existing SSPA mechanism, no matter whether the applications are submitted in paper form or via the SSPA e-Platform, the applications, once submitted, cannot be retrieved or cancelled, and no change can be made to the order of school preference. Hence, parents are not allowed to change the order of school preference after receiving notifications of their children's successful DP applications from participating secondary schools.

(17) Q Can participating secondary schools enquire parents about their children's order of school preference?

A Under the existing SSPA System, parents who apply for DP for their children do not have to disclose their order of school preference to the schools concerned. The existing SSPA mechanism remains unchanged under the notification arrangements. Hence, participating secondary schools should not enquire parents about the related information.

(18) Q For parents who receive notifications from participating secondary schools of their children’s successful DP applications, can they surrender the DP and fill out the Choice Form for participation in the CA?

A Under the existing SSPA mechanism, all students who are allocated with DP will not be allocated other school places at the CA stage. Hence, parents of successful DP applicants are not required to make school choices on the Choice Form. Even if they make school choices on the Choice Form at the CA stage which begins in April 2024, their children will still be allocated to the secondary schools they have successfully applied to at the DP stage according to the existing mechanism.

(19) Q Are the notification arrangements the same as an official release of DP results? After receiving notifications from participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants, are parents required to complete registration procedures with the schools concerned at once?

A The notification arrangements as administrative measures are not the same as the release of the final allocation results. The existing SSPA mechanism and procedures remain unchanged. All students in this SSPA cycle will receive the SSPA allocation results (including results of the DP and CA stages) in July 2024 as usual.

As the notifications from participating secondary schools to parents are not an official release of allocation results, parents are not required to complete the registration procedures with the schools concerned at once. Parents will receive the Allocation Slips and Admission Slips after the official release of SSPA results on 9 July 2024. Accordingly, parents are required to complete the registration procedures with the secondary schools allocated within a specified period (i.e. from 11 July to 12 July 2024).

(20) Q What are participating secondary schools required to note when they notify parents of successful DP applicants by letter and phone on the specified date?

A When receiving DP applications from parents (especially for parents who are residing/working outside Hong Kong), schools should remind them to update contact information in due course. Parents should also be well informed of the arrangements for notifying successful DP applicants by letter and phone on the specified date. Besides, schools should also make proper arrangements as per school-based circumstances, including reserving appropriate time for mailing to ensure that parents of successful applicants will receive written notification of their children’s inclusion in the schools’ Successful Lists for Discretionary Places on the specified date, scheduling the time for making phone calls to the parents concerned, as well as devising arrangements for parents who cannot be contacted on the specified date, etc.

(21) Q How should participating secondary schools handle phone enquiries from parents regarding whether or not their children are successful DP applicants of the schools?

A Considering the difficulties in verifying the caller's identity over the phone, schools are recommended not to disclose the information of individual successful DP applicants when receiving such enquiries in order not to contravene the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance. Schools may inform parents of the ways in which parents of successful DP applicants will be notified, and remind parents that those registered as SSPA e-Platform users may also view notifications for successful DP applicants via the SSPA e-Platform starting from 10 a.m. on the same day. If parents have other enquiries, schools may handle them according to their school-based enquiry mechanism.

(22) Q Apart from notifying parents of successful DP applicants by letter and phone, can secondary schools use other means to notify them?

A In addition to notifying parents of successful DP applicants by letter and phone, schools may also notify the parents of successful DP applicants by other means if necessary. Yet, schools are required to comply with the principles and requirements of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance when notifying the parents concerned by other means.

(23) Q Some students are notified by participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants and also offered an S1 place by an NDSS secondary school. If they decide to decline the offer from the NDSS secondary school, why must they retrieve the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form from the NDSS secondary school concerned? If the documents are not retrieved, will the students be eventually allocated to the participating secondary schools concerned?

A According to the existing mechanism, on the premise of effective use of public resources, NDSS secondary schools will collect from parents of students who accept the S1 places offered the signed Parent's Undertaking together with the original of the Primary 6 Student Record Form as confirmation of acceptance of offer and the surrendering of other subsidised S1 places (including the S1 places of participating secondary schools and Jockey Club Ti-I College) to be allocated through the SSPA System in order to prevent the students concerned from occupying two subsidised secondary school places at the same time. Under the notification arrangements, if students have been notified by participating secondary schools (including Jockey Club Ti-I College) as successful DP applicants and also offered an S1 place by an NDSS secondary school, they should decide whether to decline the offer from the NDSS secondary school within a specified period of time in April 2024 (i.e. within around 5 working days after receiving notifications from schools as successful DP applicants in late March 2024; the last date of notification to NDSS secondary schools for SSPA 2024 is 10 April 2024 under normal circumstances). If parents do not notify the NDSS secondary schools concerned and retrieve the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form within the specified period, under the existing mechanism, the students concerned will accordingly be included in the Successful Lists of Participating Students of the NDSS schools to be submitted by late April 2024 and thus they will not be allocated with S1 places of participating secondary schools, including those that have selected them as successful DP applicants.

(24) Q Can NDSS secondary schools reject parents' requests for retrieving the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form?

A The existing arrangement for collecting the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and Primary 6 Student Record Form as confirmation of parents' decision is premised on the principle of optimising the use of public resources and to prevent the students concerned from occupying two subsidised secondary school places at the same time. Under the notification arrangements, if the parents of successful DP applicants decide to decline the offer from the NDSS secondary schools, they should notify the NDSS secondary schools concerned and retrieve the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form within a specified period (i.e. within around 5 working days after receiving notifications from schools as successful DP applicants in late March 2024, the last date of notification to NDSS secondary schools for SSPA 2024 is 10 April 2024 under normal circumstances). The NDSS secondary schools have to return the relevant documents upon parents' request. Retrieval of the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking will serve as confirmation that the parents have surrendered the school places in the NDSS secondary schools. As such, parents must give prudent consideration of the matter before making the decision.

(25) Q If parents of successful DP applicants do not retrieve the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form from NDSS secondary schools within the specified period, can they retrieve these documents from the schools concerned afterwards so as to surrender the school places in the NDSS secondary schools?

A Under the existing arrangements, parents will submit to NDSS secondary schools the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form as confirmation of acceptance of the offers from NDSS secondary schools and the surrendering of other S1 places (including the S1 places of participating secondary schools and Jockey Club Ti-I College) to be allocated through the SSPA System.

Under the notification arrangements, as some students may decline the school places offered by NDSS secondary schools after receiving notifications from participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants, the parents concerned should retrieve the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form from the NDSS secondary schools within the specified period to allow the NDSS secondary schools to admit other students in accordance with their waiting lists to fill the vacancies, and submit their Successful Lists of Participating Students to the EDB by late April 2024. In this connection, under normal circumstances, parents of successful DP applicants should not retrieve the originals of the signed Parent's Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form from NDSS secondary schools after the specified period.

(26) Q If parents have retrieved the originals of the signed Parent’s Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form from the NDSS secondary schools to confirm the surrendering of the school places offered, can they request the NDSS secondary schools concerned to admit their children again in future?

A The retrieval of the originals of the signed Parent’s Undertaking and the Primary 6 Student Record Form from NDSS secondary schools serves as confirmation of parents’ decision to surrender the places offered by the NDSS secondary schools. After the release of SSPA results in July 2024, if parents apply for S1 places in the NDSS secondary schools concerned again, schools can decide whether to admit the students according to their school-based student admission mechanism.

(27) Q Can participating secondary schools amend the Successful/Reserve Lists for Discretionary Places after submission to the EDB?

A Participating secondary schools are required to submit the Successful/Reserve Lists for Discretionary Places (Lists) to the EDB on or before a specified date (the specified date for SSPA 2024 is 26 March 2024). Schools must check the Lists with extreme care to ensure the accuracy of the information before submission.

After submitting the Lists, schools are not allowed to make any changes to them. Should special circumstances, in which changes must be made to the Lists, arise, schools must provide a written explanation to the EDB as soon as possible. As changes made to the Lists may not be reflected on the SSPA e-Platform right away, after seeking consent from the EDB, the schools concerned should inform and clearly explain the changes to the parents of the affected students.

(28) Q If students have not been notified by participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants, does it mean that they will not be allocated with a school place at the DP stage?

A Under the notification arrangements, some students may receive notifications of their successful DP applications from two participating secondary schools and they will eventually be allocated to schools of their first choice according to the existing SSPA mechanism, leaving one school place unoccupied. Besides, some successful applicants may relinquish the DP allocated to them and instead accept the places offered by NDSS secondary schools. The places allocated to these successful DP applicants will also be rendered available. Hence, some students who have not been notified may be allocated with an S1 place in schools they have applied to at the DP stage in the capacity of reserve applicants.

(29) Q Can parents approach other preferred secondary schools and apply for admission after participating secondary schools have issued notifications to successful DP applicants?

A Under the existing SSPA mechanism, the S1 places of schools, after deducting the repeater and DP quota, will be used for CA. Secondary schools should not conduct any admission procedures (including the procedures of accepting applications, selecting or admitting students) to fill any possible unused places before the release of allocation results in July 2024. This is to avoid bringing undue pressure to parents and students and creating unfair circumstances. As such, parents should not approach other preferred secondary schools before the release of allocation results to avoid affecting schools' operation.

(30) Q Are participating primary schools still required to submit the internal assessment results of students who have been notified as successful DP applicants for the calculation of their allocation bands?

A Under the notification arrangements, the existing SSPA mechanism remains unchanged. Participating primary schools are still required to submit the internal assessment (IA) results at the end of Primary 5, in the middle of and at the end of P6 for all students (including those who are notified by participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants or those who are admitted by NDSS secondary schools). In the CA stage, the scaled marks of all participating students in the territory/same school net will be put into an order of merit by the computer. Then the students will be equally divided into three territory/net bands, each consisting of one-third of the total number of participating students in the territory/same school net. In other words, the number of students in each band is determined by the total number of participating students. Under the notification arrangements, the allocation bands of all participating students (including those who are notified as successful DP applicants) will be calculated based on their scaled IA results.

(31) Q Why does the EDB provide each participating primary school with its respective list of successful DP applicants in early April 2024?

A The EDB provides each participating primary school with its respective list of successful DP applicants in early April 2024 in order to facilitate primary schools' reminder to parents concerned that they do not have to make school choices at the CA stage, and provide appropriate support to students not having received notification in preparation for CA. The names of the secondary schools concerned, the order of school preference in DP applications and whether the students are selected as successful DP applicants by one or two secondary schools will not be indicated on the lists.

(32) Q Can primary or secondary schools disclose to the public the proportion or number of students who are notified by participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants?

A Under the notification arrangements, individual students may be selected as successful DP applicants by two participating secondary schools. They will eventually be allocated to schools of their first choice, while some successful applicants may opt to study in NDSS secondary schools. Hence, some students who have not been selected as successful DP applicants may still have the opportunity to be allocated DP in the capacity of reserve applicants. In other words, the proportion or number of students who are notified by participating secondary schools as successful DP applicants is not the final DP application results. Students on the Successful List for Discretionary Places of a school may not be eventually allocated to that school. In addition, whether or not students will be selected as successful applicants at the DP stage is affected by various factors, including parents' strategies for choosing schools, the number of applicants, the admission criteria and weightings, and the number of school places, etc. Hence, the proportion or number of students who receive notifications of their successful DP applications to participating secondary schools is not an actual indicator of the academic level or overall performance of the schools concerned. Primary or secondary schools are not allowed to disclose the related information/data to avoid affecting other students' strategies for choosing schools at the CA stage.

School Places Allocation Section
Education Bureau
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