$1 million supports students with special needs at unique independent schools

VANCOUVER – The Province is providing an extra $1 million to boost its support for special needs students attending specialized independent schools in B.C. The funds are more than doubling the number of designated Special Education Schools (SES) from six to 15, and providing $2,000 to support each qualified student.

Education Minister Mike Bernier made the announcement today joined by the Federation of Independent School Associations, along with students and staff at PALS Autism school, a newly designated SES school that offers year-round educational programs supporting the needs of individuals with moderate to severe Autism Spectrum Disorder.

“All students in our province deserve a learning environment that helps them succeed. Our expanded support for Special Education schools is expanding choice for parents and support for some of our most vulnerable children,” said Bernier. “These schools are offering tailored and specialized learning programs that help bring countless benefits to these children and their families.”

Each of the 15 SES schools is unique, and provides specific and focussed environments for students with special needs to learn vital academic, communication, social and life skills, tailored to their abilities.

Highly specialized programs are designed for students with a wide range of special needs, including but not limited to those who are deaf or hard of hearing, dealing with mental health issues, behavioural challenges and developmental difficulties, as well as at-risk youth.

“The increase in designated SES schools is reflecting the need for highly specialized programs, supporting students with a wide range of abilities,” said Simon Gibson, parliamentary secretary for independent schools. “By designating nine additional SES schools, we are increasing the profile of programs and supports for those with special learning needs, and providing educational choices for families.”

Inclusive SES schools are connecting students with one-to-one tutoring, and offering additional supports provided by highly trained teachers and specialists such as occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists.

“At-risk students or students with special needs require a much higher level of support than regularly enrolled students,” said Dr. Peter Froese, executive director with the Federation of Independent School Associations. “That is why the 15 special education schools are so grateful to the Ministry of Education for providing a Special Education School grant so that vulnerable students can get the support they desperately need. This partnership between government and Special Education Schools enables vulnerable students to acquire the skills they need to
function independently in society when they graduate.”

Programs offered in Special Education Schools often focus on all aspects of the student’s life by building self-confidence and awareness, realizing goals and achievement, and creating individualized, paced learning that matches their abilities and supports their passions.

“The SES designation will surely make a great difference for the students at PALS Autism School,” said PALS Autism school principal Andrea Kasunic. “Parents enrol their children at our year-round school so they can receive a comprehensive education, targeting individual academic, communication, behaviour, daily living, and social goals. Parents can continue to take comfort knowing their children have a place to learn full-time in small groups. Our highly trained staff can continue to apply the science of applied behaviour analysis in their teaching strategies and behavioural interventions. And most importantly, we can continue to communicate daily with families and strive to help them see their child’s progress at school generalize to home and family life. We are feeling very inspired for the future, knowing how much our government supports special education.”

To qualify for special education designation and funding, schools must exclusively enrol students with special needs as well as maintain a 1:6 educator to student ratio.

Even with the expanded funding for SES schools, there is higher-per-pupil funding for students with special needs in the public system. While every public or independent school student with qualifying special needs receives the same special needs supplement, students in the public system are funded at the full per pupil rate. Those in SES schools are funded at the Group 1 independent school rate of 50% plus the new SES funding.

Government funding for students with special needs in the public school system is more than $983 million.

Quick Facts:

- Special needs categories are established to assist school districts and independent schools in identifying the needs of students, and providing the appropriate education programs. Funding goes to a district or independent school based on the level of special needs:
  - Level 1 supplementary funding: $37,700 per student
  - Level 2 supplementary funding: $18,850 per student
  - Level 3 supplementary funding: $9,500 per student
- For more information on special needs education in B.C., visit: 
  [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/k-12-funding-special-needs](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/k-12-funding-special-needs)
  [http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/independent-schools/special-education-programs-and-funding-independent-schools](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/independent-schools/special-education-programs-and-funding-independent-schools)
- The original six SES schools were previously receiving $2,200 per special needs students in specific categories. The changes mean each of those six schools will see an increase in total funding to support all their students with special needs.

A backgrounder follows.
Special Education Services school profiles

Newly designated SES schools

PALS Autism school – Vancouver: http://palsautismschool.ca

- PALS provides year-round educational programs that support the needs of individuals with moderate to severe Autism Spectrum Disorder and other related issues.
- PALS typically serves students until they are no longer school-age, and a before and after school care program is offered to all families.
- All staff have a high degree of expertise, and benefit from continuous professional development. The school employs a full-time board certified behaviour analyst, and contracts the weekly services of a speech and language pathologist and occupational therapist.
- Individualized plans are designed for all students, and programming typically includes small group and one-to-one instruction in communication, life skills, social skills and academics.

Artemis Place Secondary – Victoria: http://artemisplace.org

- Artemis Place Secondary offers integrated counselling life skills, and educational programming to high school-aged women, mothers and transgendered youth.
- Students are encouraged to articulate their challenges, strengths and goals to achieve educational success as well as increased health and wellness.
- Multiple professionals and community support staff collaborate to best support each student’s needs.
- Artemis provides a breakfast/lunch program, peer support and parenting education programming.

Choice School for the Gifted and Exceptional – Richmond (http://choiceschool.org)

- The Choice School for the Gifted and Exceptional offers a supportive learning environment for high-ability gifted students, some of whom have learning challenges or social-emotional needs.
- The school offers small class sizes and flexible learning opportunities that allow students to learn at a pace, depth and breadth that matches their abilities and their passions.
- The choice curriculum focuses on expanding core competencies through inquiry, critical thinking and problem-based learning.
- Faculty has specialized training in teaching gifted learners and those with complex learning challenges.

Fawkes Academy – Richmond: www.fawkesacademy.ca
- Fawkes Academy provides individualized educational programs for children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other complex developmental disorders from kindergarten through to Grade 12.
- Fawkes Academy offers individual programming, including academic courses to earn Dogwood Certificates, and adaptations and modifications to the academic programs to meet the BC Learning outcomes or Evergreen Certificate requirements.
- A key aspect of the program is parent involvement that is vital for generalization of skills and success outside of the school setting and in life.


- Honour Secondary combines academic programming with recreation, skills development and support services for students working on grades 10-12, who have been involved with the Ministry of Children and Family Development.
- The school also features programs encouraging life skills and interest exploration, family support, one to one support, integration with Surrey Youth Resource Centres, lunch and breakfast programs, and support with professional appointments.
- Honour Secondary school is run by the Pacific Community Resources Society, which provides and coordinates a range of wrap around support services, including employment, housing, addictions counselling, family counselling and prevention programs, in addition to education programs.

Mediated Learning Academy – Coquitlam: [http://mediatedlearningacademy.org](http://mediatedlearningacademy.org)

- Mediated Learning Academy was created for children with a wide variety of challenges.
- A team of teachers, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and counselors ensure that children receive the appropriate academic programs and necessary therapies.
- Keywords that guide the school’s approach are: respect, active engagement, connections, relationships, personal safety, change and growth, brain based teaching, cognitive programs.

Purpose Secondary school – New Westminster: [www.purposeseccondary.org](http://www.purposeseccondary.org)

- Purpose Secondary school is dedicated to meeting the needs of students who, for a variety of reasons, have chosen to pursue their education in an independent school setting.
- Students are encouraged to achieve their potential, take responsibility for their lives and develop a strong set of learning and life skills.
- Skilled teachers and staff help each student address their challenges related to learning and their social and emotional well-being or mental health.
- Purpose Secondary school is part of a larger social service agency that offers a continuum of programs to children, youth and family in the areas of health, education, childcare, counselling and skill development.

The Whytecliff Agile Learning Centre – Burnaby and Langley: [http://focusfoundation.ca](http://focusfoundation.ca)

- Whytecliff Agile Learning Centre – operated by the Focus Foundation of B.C. – offers programs designed for vulnerable, marginalized youth (aged 13-19) who are not
experiencing success in traditional school settings and often have complex needs and emotional and behavioral challenges.

- Whytecliff is accredited both as an education program and as a mental health and wellness and addictions program.
- The program seeks to address all aspects of a child’s home, social, emotional, behavioral and educational environment.

1991 designated SES schools

Discovery school – Victoria: [www.discoveryschool.ca](http://www.discoveryschool.ca)

- Discovery school specializes in meeting the needs of children with specific learning disabilities, particularly those with additional diagnoses.
- Students have individualized education programs that address different learning styles, balance challenge with success, and build self-confidence and self-esteem.
- A multi-disciplinary team of specialists provide additional learning assistance, special education assistants, vision training, social skills sessions, counselling and speech therapy as needed.

Fraser Academy – Vancouver: [https://fraseracademy.ca](http://https://fraseracademy.ca)

- Fraser Academy specialises in teaching students with language-based learning disabilities
- The school uses a structured, individualized and therapeutic approach to learning.
- Faculty are experts in delivering direct, explicit instruction and providing personalized programming based on student needs and learning profiles.

Glen Eden school – Richmond: [www.gleneden.org](http://www.gleneden.org)

- Glen Eden school caters to students who have complex psychological, neuropsychiatric, socio-emotional and/or developmental difficulties.
- A multi-disciplinary team consisting of teachers, instructors, therapists and a neuro-scientist address both clinical and educational needs of enrolled students.
- The staff work with students to cultivate self-regulation and self-awareness. Each student is provided with a highly individualized program in which educational and clinical needs are systematically assessed, evaluated and adjusted on an ongoing basis.

James Cameron school – Maple Ridge: [http://jcs.bc.ca](http://jcs.bc.ca)

- James Cameron school fosters the intellectual, social, emotional and physical development of children who have learning disabilities by fostering self-confidence, building skills, and maximizing learning and personal success.
- Students are empowered to engage in learning by focusing on understanding.
- The school embraces diversity and aims to support and inspire every student in a caring and stimulating learning environment.


- Kenneth Gordon Maplewood school is a dynamic and adaptive K-12 learning environment that specializes in teaching children with challenges and disorders, such as dyslexia and Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- Students engage in whole class learning, small group instruction, as well as daily one-on-
one tutoring.

- In addition to delivering the full B.C. curriculum, the school has a particular emphasis on developing critical thinking and problem solving strategies, executive functioning skills, and social-emotional attributes through direct instruction, inquiry learning, applied technical skills development and supervised play.

**Children’s Hearing and Speech Centre of BC – Vancouver: [http://childrenshearing.ca](http://childrenshearing.ca)**

- The Children’s Hearing and Speech Centre teaches children who are deaf and hard of hearing to listen and speak, and to fully participate in the hearing world.
- The centre offers a continuum of services that starts at birth, and continues until Grade 12.
- Programs provide learning experiences that support building listening, language, social pragmatics and academic readiness skills for successful integration into general education schools.
- There are opportunities for parent education and providing families the means to interact with other children and adults who are deaf or hard of hearing.

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