

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Panel on Education

Background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 January 2006

Provision of education to children of ethnic minorities

Purpose

This paper provides background information on provision of education to children of ethnic minorities. This paper also summarises relevant discussions of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on the subject matter.

Government policy

2. According to the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), all eligible local children, including non-Chinese speaking children of ethnic minorities, are entitled to nine-year free and universal education. As far as the Bureau is concerned, children of ethnic minorities generally refer to South Asian (mainly Indian/Pakistani/Nepalese) children who are residing in Hong Kong.

3. It is the established Government policy to facilitate early integration of students of ethnic minorities into the local education system. Parents of children of ethnic minorities could apply to schools direct, or through EMB which has pledged to arrange places for these children within 21 working days. From the 2004 allocation cycle for admission to Primary one and Secondary one onwards, students of ethnic minorities may have a choice of opting for mainstream schools, or schools that traditionally admit a large number of students of ethnic minorities.

4. According to the Administration, apart from providing adaptation programmes for students of ethnic minorities before their joining local schools, EMB also offers various support services for schools admitting these students with a view to facilitating their early integration and smooth adaptation into the local education system and school life. Details of these support services are set out in an information note provided by the Administration to the Panel [LC Paper No. CB(2)2305/04-05(01) issued on 18 July 2005].

5. Article 39 of the Basic Law provides that the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, shall be implemented through the law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

6. The right of everyone to education is protected under Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Under Article 13, the State Parties recognise that –

- (a) primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all;
- (b) secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
- (c) higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;
- (d) fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education; and
- (e) the development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

The States Parties also undertake “to have respect for the liberty of parents and when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions”.

7. The right to education and training of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, is guaranteed under Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

8. According to the initial report of HKSAR submitted to the United Nations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in late 2000 (paragraph 155 of the initial report refers), the HKSAR Government acknowledges without reservation that Article 13 of the

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requires governments to provide free and compulsory primary education to all within their jurisdiction. The HKSAR Government, however, does not consider that free education is required to be provided to the specifications of particular groups.

9. According to the second report submitted by HKSAR under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in June 2003 (paragraphs 13.26 and 13.27 of the second report refer), there are nine public sector schools at that time that have admitted relatively a larger number of non-Chinese speakers. These schools have tailored their curricula to provide non-Chinese speaking children sufficient exposure to Chinese to facilitate their future integration into the wider society of Hong Kong. Block grants of HK\$2,675 per primary student and HK\$3,968 per secondary student would be provided for these schools under a School-based Support Scheme Grant (paragraph 13.30 of the second report refers). The aim is to enable schools to provide school-based support, such as tutorial classes on Chinese and/or English, adaptation programmes, special teaching materials, etc.

10. EMB had commissioned a local university to conduct a three-year longitudinal study in November 2004 to further understand the integration of students of ethnic minorities in the school community. The study will track the development and adaptation of these students newly allocated to Primary one in mainstream schools in the 2004-05 school year until they complete Primary three in the 2006-07 school year.

Deliberations of the Panel on Education

Meetings

11. The Panel on Education discussed the education issues raised in the initial report of HKSAR in the light of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at its meeting on 23 April 2001. The Panel also discussed the allocation of secondary school places for children of ethnic minorities at its meeting on 21 June 2004. When the Panel received a policy briefing by the Secretary for Education and Manpower on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2005 at a special meeting on 20 January 2005, members had expressed concern about education support for children of ethnic minorities. The views and concerns expressed by members at these meetings are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Provision of basic education to children of ethnic minorities

12. Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong and Hon Emily LAU expressed concern that some children of ethnic minorities might be unable to commence their studies at primary schools because of language difficulties. They also pointed out that as

some parents of ethnic minorities might not be aware of the statutory requirement to send their children to schools, the Administration should promote parents' awareness of their legal obligations in respect of the provision of nine-year compulsory education to children.

13. The Administration informed the Panel that while there might be isolated cases of non-attendance at school under very exceptional circumstances, there were adequate places in the seven government or aided schools providing basic education for non-Chinese speaking children of ethnic minorities. The Administration assured members that it would reinforce contacts with communities of ethnic minorities and collaborate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Consul-General in Hong Kong to assist children of ethnic minorities to attend schools.

14. Hon Emily LAU expressed concern about the results of a survey that there were about 20 000 South Asian young people who should attend schools in Hong Kong and 40% of them had to wait for six to 12 months before they could be allocated a school place. She asked whether the HKSAR Government had failed to meet the obligations under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in respect of provision of education to ethnic minorities.

15. The Administration explained to the Panel that as many parents preferred to send their children to schools in the vicinity of their residence, these children would have to wait a longer time for suitable school placement. As the seven government and aided schools had the capacity to operate 23 additional classes on demand, the HKSAR Government should not be blamed for failing to meet the international obligations on the basis of some isolated cases of non-attendance at school. The Administration was committed to providing all non-Chinese speaking children with a school place.

Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) arrangement for children of ethnic minorities

16. Hon TSANG Yok-sing expressed concern that under the revised SSPA arrangements which was implemented with effective from the 2004 allocation cycle (paragraph 3 above refers), it might be more difficult for children of ethnic minorities to enrol in mainstream schools adopting English as medium of instruction, even though their parents would prefer them to learn in English rather than Chinese in secondary schools.

17. The Administration explained to the Panel that for the Central Allocation stage under the revised SSPA arrangement, students of ethnic minorities were provided with a choice of 30 schools and allocated places on a school net basis. The Administration pointed out that to cater for the need of primary students of ethnic minorities who had little exposure to Chinese language, adequate Secondary one places of secondary schools which traditionally admitted a large

number of students of ethnic minorities had been provided in all school nets with these students.

18. The Administration further pointed out that at the Discretionary Places stage, Primary six students of ethnic minorities could still apply to any one participating secondary school without the restriction of school net. In the 2004-05 school year, 210 of the 451 students of ethnic minorities participated in SSPA had successfully secured a Secondary one place at the Discretionary Places stage. Of the remaining 241 students of ethnic minorities, some 37% of them had included mainstream secondary schools in their choice of schools, and 18% of these schools adopted Chinese as medium of instruction.

19. Mr TSANG Yok-sing and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern about the impact of the revised SSPA arrangement on the operation of mainstream schools and schools which traditionally admitted a large number of students of ethnic minorities. Mr TSANG asked how these schools would adjust their operation to meet the learning and adaptation needs of a mixture of local students and students of ethnic minorities.

20. The Administration responded that an assessment tool had been provided to help primary schools with students of ethnic minorities to assess their Chinese standard so as to facilitate their parents to make suitable and informed school choices. Given that the number of students of ethnic minorities who would choose to go to mainstream schools was small and those who opted for these schools would have a keen interest to learn in Chinese, the mainstream schools should have no problem taking care of their learning and adaptation needs. In addition, EMB would encourage schools which traditionally admitted a large number of students of ethnic minorities to include Chinese language in their curriculum so that these students could learn Chinese language if they wished to do so.

21. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed dissatisfaction that EMB had not consulted parents and schools which traditionally admitted a large number of students of ethnic minorities as they would be directly affected by the revised SSPA arrangement. He felt strongly that the Administration should have consulted parents and the primary school sector on the best way to implement an integration policy for children of ethnic minorities. In addition, a transition period should be provided for primary schools to adapt to the policy and students of ethnic minorities to prepare for learning in Chinese in mainstream secondary schools. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that EMB should start consulting parents of the Primary one to five students of ethnic minorities on the integration policy.

22. The Administration responded that EMB had consulted the SSPA Committee as well as exchanged views with concern groups and NGOs and members of the Ethnic Minorities Forum on the revised SSPA arrangement. Their views should have included the views of the parents of the students of

ethnic minorities. The Administration also explained that the revised SSPA arrangement would provide more school choices to students of ethnic minorities who would be given a choice among 30 schools comprising both mainstream schools and schools which traditionally admitted a large number students of ethnic minorities. The Administration further informed members that according to past experience, about 90% of students of ethnic minorities were enrolled in three of the 10 schools which traditionally admitted a large number of students of ethnic minorities. The competition for places in the other seven schools was very keen as these schools normally admitted band one students.

23. Mr Tommy CHEUNG considered that EMB should provide support to mainstream schools which had admitted students of ethnic minorities and arrange students of ethnic minorities who experienced learning difficulties in mainstream schools to switch to schools which traditionally admitted more students of ethnic minorities. The Administration responded that EMB was aware of the need to strengthen the support to mainstream schools which might admit students of ethnic minorities for the first time. EMB would provide on-site school-based curriculum support to these schools. EMB would also develop a webpage to provide a platform for all language teachers to share their experiences in catering for different needs of learners at schools.

Education support for children of ethnic minorities

24. Mr Jasper TSANG expressed concern about the serious problem of inter-generational poverty among families of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. He pointed out that families of some ethnic minorities from South-East Asian countries were mostly of low socio-economic status and most of their children could not learn through Chinese or English. A large majority of these children would discontinue their school education at junior secondary levels and some of them might go astray. He considered that the current policy on provision of integrated education to children of ethnic minorities could not improve the situation of these children as they did not have adequate family support. Mr TSANG and Dr YEUNG Sum were of the view that given their disadvantaged position in the community, the Administration should allocate sufficient resources to assist children of ethnic minorities in pursuit of education and development of skills and abilities to lead a normal and fruitful life.

25. The Administration responded that poverty of families of ethnic minorities was a complicated problem which could only be resolved through a holistic package of policies and measures. The Administration would continue to collaborate with NGOs and educational institutions in the provision of education support services to children of ethnic minorities. In particular, the Vocational Training Council had agreed to offer career-oriented programmes suitable for children of ethnic minorities who could learn through English. The Administration considered that the results of the provision of integrated education to children of ethnic minorities should be assessed over a suitable length of time.

Questions raised at Council meetings relating to provision of education to children of ethnic minorities

26. During the current term of the Legislative Council (LegCo), Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong and Ms Emily LAU raised written questions regarding provision of education to ethnic minorities at the Council meetings on 6 July and 23 November 2005 respectively. These two questions and the corresponding written replies are in **Appendices I and II** respectively. A list of all the questions raised by Members on provision of education to children of ethnic minorities at Council meetings since the first term of LegCo is in **Appendix III**. The Official Records of Proceedings of the relevant Council meetings are available on the LegCo website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk>.

Relevant documents

27. Members may wish to refer to the minutes of the relevant meetings of the Panel on Education as well as the relevant papers provided by the Administration for these meetings as set out in **Appendix IV**. Soft copies of these documents are available at the website of the LegCo at <http://www.legco.gov.hk>.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 January 2006

Appendix I

LEGCO QUESTION No. 16

(Written Reply)

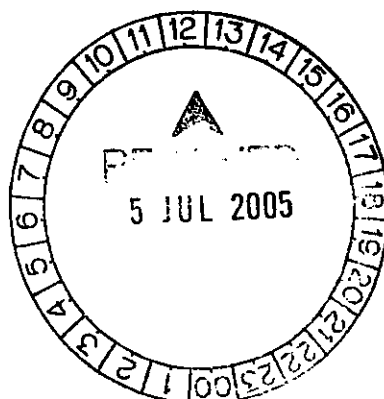
Asked by: Hon Cheung Man-kwongDate of Sitting: 6 July 2005Replied by: Secretary for Education
and Manpower**Question:**

Regarding education for the ethnic minorities, will the Government inform this Council of the following:

- (a) the estimated number of school-age ethnic minorities in each of the coming five years, with a breakdown by age groups;
- (b) the respective numbers, in each of the past three years, of ethnic minorities attending schools (with a breakdown by learning stages), having completed a learning stage and having dropped out of school, and their respective percentages in the ethnic minority population of the relevant ages;
- (c) the channels through which the Administration releases information about school enrolment to the ethnic minorities; and
- (d) whether children of the ethnic minorities are eligible for assistance under the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme and Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme; if so, of the relevant numbers of applications in the past three years and the amounts of assistance involved; if not, whether the Government will include these children in the Schemes to encourage them to receive pre-primary education?

Reply:

Madam President,



First of all, I would like to point out that people in the community may have different ideas as to who should be regarded as "ethnic minorities". For the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), ethnic minority children generally refer to South Asian (mainly Indian/Pakistani/Nepalese) children who are residing in Hong Kong. The replies should be read in this context.

- (a) Our planning for schools is premised on our projection of the overall student population. Moreover, a child's racial origin/nationality does not affect his/her eligibility for school admission. The Administration therefore, does not keep separate statistics on the number of school-age ethnic minority children for the coming five years.
- (b) For the same reason as stated in (a), EMB does not keep the statistics referred to in part (b) of the question;
- (c) The EMB, in collaboration with the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), publishes leaflets in English and several ethnic minority languages on various education and support services available for ethnic minority children. The ethnic minorities may obtain such information leaflets from relevant non-governmental organisations, the EMB's Regional Education Offices and the Public Enquiry Service Centres of the Home Affairs Department. The HAB would also disseminate such information direct to the ethnic minority groups. In addition, information on education and placement services is available on the EMB's website for parents' easy access.

For the arrangements for admission to Primary One and Secondary One, the EMB organizes briefings and provides relevant materials in several ethnic minority languages to help ethnic minority parents better understand the allocation arrangements and the application procedures.

- (d) Under the existing Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme and Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme, all eligible applicants, including ethnic minority children, may apply for assistance. Since the racial origin/nationality does not affect the eligibility of the applicants, the Administration does not keep separate statistics on the applications from and the amounts of assistance for ethnic minority children.

LEGCO QUESTION No. 19
(Written Reply)

Asked by: Hon Emily LAU

Date of Sitting: 23 November 2005

Replied by: Secretary for Education
and Manpower

Question:

Regarding the education of students of the ethnic minorities, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

- (a) in each of the past ten years, of the number of students of the ethnic minorities who:
- (i) sat for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination, together with their passing rates for Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics; and
 - (ii) furthered their studies in matriculation courses; and
- (b) whether specific measures are in place to help students of the ethnic minorities to learn Chinese; if so, of the effectiveness of such measures; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

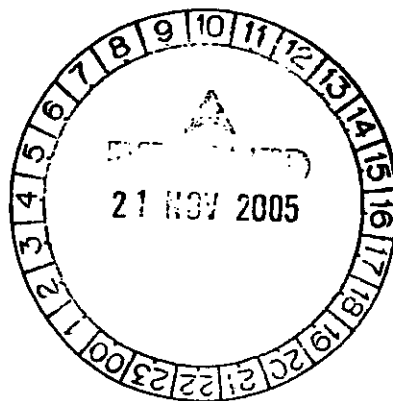
Madam President,

Our response to the questions raised regarding the education of students of the ethnic minorities is presented below :

- (a) Applicants registering for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) are not required to submit information on their racial origin/nationality. The EMB, therefore, does not have statistics on the number of students of the ethnic minorities taking part in the HKCEE and their passing rates for Chinese Language, English Language and Mathematics. Nor do we have information on the number of these students furthering their studies in matriculation courses, as a student's racial origin/nationality does not affect his/her eligibility for such courses.
- (b) The EMB collaborates with teachers and provides schools with a wide range of supporting services to help students of ethnic minorities to learn Chinese. Some specific measures include: (1) To assist schools in developing school-based learning materials and adjusting the teaching and learning progress so as to increase students' learning motivation and build up their confidence; (2) To promote professional development of teachers, help them understand the difficulties faced by these students so that they can develop flexible teaching strategies, introduce continuous assessment which could provide positive feedback to students' learning; (3) To assist schools to build up a school network and organize activities for teachers to share their successful teaching experience and teaching resources.

The above measures have effectively helped students of ethnic minorities learn Chinese. With better understanding about the learning needs of these students, schools can better design the curriculum and develop appropriate learning materials for them. Schools can also arrange different programmes, such as pull-out programme on vocabulary building and Chinese Language tutorials to cater for the learning diversity of students and improve their language ability. Some schools also create

language-rich environment through organising peer support activities (e.g. Big Brother and Big Sister Scheme, Reading Ambassadors). These programmes do not only help enhance the speaking and listening abilities of these students, build up their repertoire of Chinese words and accelerate the speed at which they learn new words, but also enhance their learning motivation and confidence. As observed from school visits, students of ethnic minorities participated actively and spoke proactively in classes. Some even showed that they loved learning Chinese and had participated actively in language learning activities. Cultural integration within schools was also fostered.



Appendix III

Panel on Education

List of questions raised at Council meetings relating to provision of education to children of ethnic minorities since the first term of the Legislative Council

Meeting Date	Question/Motion
14.6.2000	Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong raised a written question on "Schooling of Ethnic Nepalese Children and Youths Residing in Hong Kong".
15.11.2000	Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong raised a written question on "Education for Non-Chinese Asian Children and Youths ".
7.3.2001	Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip raised a written question on "Protection of Rights and Benefits of Ethnic Minorities".
5.12.2001	Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing raised a written question on "Education for Non-Chinese Speaking Children".
6.7.2005	Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong raised a written question on "Education for Ethnic Minorities".
23.11.2005	Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing raised a written question on "Education for the ethnic minorities".

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 January 2006

Relevant documents on the Provision of education to children of ethnic minorities

Date of meeting	Meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
23.4.2001	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1829/00-01
		Administration's paper on "School education for children of ethnic minorities"	CB(2)46/01-02(01)
		Extract of the submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission	CB(2)1317/00-01(01)
		Extract of the submission from the Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor	CB(2)1317/00-01(02)
21.6.2004	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)3324/03-04
		Administration's paper on "Secondary school places allocation arrangement for children for ethnic minorities"	CB(2)2786/03-04(02)
		Administration's paper on "Results of secondary school places allocation 2004 ethnic minority children"	CB(2)3156/03-04(01)
20.1.2005	Panel on Education	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1630/04-05
		Administration's paper on "education support for ethnic minority children"	CB(2)2305/04-05(01)