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Panel on Education

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 8 January 2007

Provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for non-Chinese speaking students

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the provision of education for children of ethnic minorities and summarises the discussions of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on issues relating to their learning of the Chinese Language.

Government policy

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

3. 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 States 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.

4. 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".

5. 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.

6. According to the initial report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (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.

7. The established Government policy is 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 opt for mainstream schools, or schools that traditionally admit a larger number of students of ethnic minorities. As at July 2006, there are seven primary schools and three secondary schools that traditionally admit a larger number of NCS students.

Deliberations of the Panel

8. Since 2001, the Panel had discussed the provision of education for ethnic minorities at various meetings. The issues raised include integrated education for children of ethnic minorities, Secondary School Places Allocation arrangements for these children, distribution of schools that traditionally admit a larger number of NCS students, provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students, education of NCS students under the new academic structure and support for NCS students. The following paragraphs summarise the Panel's discussions on the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students.

Need for an alternative Chinese Language curriculum

9. At present, there is one Chinese Language curriculum for all learners irrespective of whether they are native Chinese speakers. Many organisations which had presented views to the Panel highlighted the difficulties encountered by NCS students in following the Chinese Language curriculum. These organisations pointed out that EMB left it to schools to adapt the Chinese Language curriculum for different students. Different schools used different reference materials for teaching. Some schools adopted textbooks used by local schools, while others used teaching materials designed and developed by front line teachers. Coupled with the fact that NCS students usually communicated among themselves in English or in their mother tongue, the vast majority of NCS students could not follow the mainstream Chinese Language curriculum during their primary studies. This in turn limited their choices for quality secondary schools and many NCS students eventually ended up with poor results in public examinations. Many ethnic minority groups stressed that proficiency in Chinese was essential for NCS students to pursue further education, get a decent job and improve their socio-economic status in Hong Kong. They asked for an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for selection by NCS students.

10. Members had considered the implications of providing an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students. They had invited the Equal Opportunities Commission to give views on the legal aspect. In response, the Equal Opportunities Commission advised that while the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum would not constitute discrimination against children of ethnic minorities, such provision would mean a lower requirement and NCS students studying the alternative curriculum would be regarded as less proficient than their Chinese peers in the academic subject. In addition, the provision might also affect the progress and extent of integration of ethnic minorities into the community.

11. The Administration advised that the central curriculum framework for the Chinese Language was divided into key stages and was flexible enough to accommodate different adaptations in catering for a wide range of learner abilities and interests. Similar curriculum frameworks and adaptation approach were adopted in the Mainland, Singapore and Taiwan for NCS students. From the professional perspective of curriculum design, an adapted school-based version of the Chinese Language curriculum which was competency-based and suitable for NCS students was essentially an "alternative" curriculum for second Chinese language learners which could cater for their needs and diversity in learning without creating a discriminative label.

12. The Administration further pointed out that the current Chinese Language curriculum was competency-based, with emphasis on developing the basic language skills of students in reading, writing, listening and speaking; enriching their knowledge about the Chinese culture and literature; developing thinking and independent learning skills; and cultivating positive moral values. The school-based curricula could be designed by making adaptations to the central curriculum to suit the Chinese competency levels of different NCS students. The Administration considered that suitable school-based adaptations of the central curriculum, coupled with effective learning and teaching strategies and resources support, should enable NCS students to acquire, upon completion of secondary education, a recognised qualification in the Chinese Language. In this regard, the Administration was making necessary arrangements for interested NCS students to participate in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Chinese) Examination in Hong Kong for NCS students beginning in 2007. Moreover, standards-referenced reporting would be adopted in the Chinese Language and the English Language from the 2007 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination onwards as well as in the future Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education.

Support for schools in adapting the curriculum

13. Members had sought details on the provision of support for schools in the design of school-based Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students. The Administration advised that to assist schools that had admitted NCS students in adapting the teaching contents and materials under the curriculum framework for the Chinese Language, on-site support had been provided to seven schools since the 2004-2005 school year and would be extended to over a dozen designated schools admitting NCS students. Assistance would also be provided to these schools in developing Chinese teaching resources (including learning objectives, teaching contents and strategies as well as assessment designs at different stages) for NCS students, capitalising on the practical experience of their teachers of the Chinese Language. The Administration would coordinate and consolidate the best practices from different schools with a view to enriching and modifying the teaching resources developed. The resources would be disseminated to all schools to enable

those NCS students not studying in the designated schools to learn Chinese more effectively. The initial compilation of Chinese teaching resources for Primary 1 to 3 and Secondary 1 to 5 would be completed by the end of the 2006-2007 school year, while the compilation and review of teaching resources for Primary 1 to Secondary 5 would be completed by the end of 2007-2008.

14. The Administration also indicated that an experience-sharing network for schools admitting NCS students had been established. To provide assistance in the teaching of the Chinese Language to NCS students, tertiary institution(s) would be commissioned to run professional development programmes for teachers in the 2006-2007 school year and set up Chinese Language Learning Support Centre(s) to provide Chinese tutorial classes for NCS secondary students after school or during holidays.

Admission to post-secondary institutions

15. Members considered it important to provide NCS students with opportunities for access to post-secondary education including first-year-first-degree programmes in the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions. Members were of the view that under the existing arrangements, it was difficult for NCS students to acquire a recognized qualification in the Chinese Language for admission to the UGC-funded institutions.

16. The Administration explained that the UGC-funded institutions were already able to suitably allow flexibility for NCS students when applying the Chinese language requirement within the framework of existing public examinations. The institutions had autonomy over student admission, and had been requested to set minimum requirements in both English and Chinese for admission purpose. The Administration had undertaken to convey the views of the Panel and the ethnic minority groups to the institutions so that they could take the circumstances of NCS students into account and exercise flexibility.

Motion

17. Notwithstanding the explanations provided by the Administration, members maintained the view that it was necessary to design an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students to facilitate their pursuit of further education; to find employment; and to integrate into the community. At its meeting on 10 July 2006, the Panel passed the following motion -

"That this Panel urges the Government to immediately formulate an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for non-Chinese speaking students and establish another open examination which is recognized by local universities as a channel for non-Chinese speaking students to enter universities and receive post-secondary education in Hong Kong."

Relevant papers

18. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix

Relevant papers on the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for non-Chinese speaking students

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	23.4.2001	Minutes CB(2)1317/00-01(01) CB(2)1317/00-01(02) CB(2)46/01-02(01)
Panel on Education	21.6.2004	Minutes CB(2)2786/03-04(02) CB(2)3156/03-04(01)
Panel on Education	20.1.2005	Minutes CB(2)2305/04-05(01)
Legislative Council	23.11.2005	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 135 - 136 (Question)
Panel on Education	9.1.2006	Minutes CB(2)779/05-06(01) CB(2)774/05-06(01) CB(2)1536/05-06(01)
Legislative Council	24.5.2006	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 92 - 95 (Question)
Panel on Education	10.7.2006	Minutes CB(2)2642/05-06(04) CB(2)2642/05-06(06) CB(2)2792/05-06(01)

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