

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)579/08-09(07)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 12 January 2009**

Education for non-Chinese speaking students

Purpose

This paper provides updated information on the discussions of the Panel on Education (the Panel) on issues relating to education for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students.

Government policy

2. According to the Education Bureau (EDB), all eligible local children, including NCS children of ethnic minorities, are entitled to 12-year free education. As far as EDB is concerned, children of ethnic minorities generally refer to South Asian (mainly Indian/Pakistani/Nepalese) children who are residing in Hong Kong.

3. 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 can apply to schools direct, or through EDB which has pledged to arrange places for these children within 21 working days. From the 2004 allocation cycle for admission to Primary One (P1) and Secondary One (S1) onwards, students of ethnic minorities may opt for mainstream schools, or schools that traditionally admit a large number of students of ethnic minorities. As at the 2008-2009 school year, there are 22 designated schools which admit NCS students.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. The Panel has followed up the subject of the provision of education for ethnic minorities since 2001. The major concerns raised by members include

the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students, opportunities for post-secondary education and employment for these students, support measures and education for NCS students with special educational needs (SEN). The Panel's discussions on these issues are summarized in the following paragraphs.

An alternative Chinese Language curriculum

5. At present, there is one Chinese Language curriculum for all learners, irrespective of whether or not they are native Chinese speakers. Many organizations which had presented views to the Panel highlighted the difficulties encountered by NCS students in following the Chinese Language curriculum. According to these organizations, EDB left it to schools to adapt the Chinese Language curriculum for their students. Different schools used different reference materials for teaching. Some schools adopted the textbooks used by local schools, while others used the teaching materials designed and developed by front-line teachers. As 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. Their lack of proficiency in Chinese had limited their choices for quality secondary schools, and many NCS students eventually ended up with poor performance in public examinations. The ethnic minority groups stressed that proficiency in Chinese was a prerequisite for pursuing further education, getting a decent job, and improving their socio-economic status in Hong Kong. They asked for the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for selection by NCS students.

6. While acknowledging the concerns of the ethnic minority groups, members had considered the implications of providing an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students. In response to the Panel, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) 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 ethnic minority students studying the alternative curriculum would be regarded as less proficient than their Chinese peers in the subject. This might affect the progress and extent of integration of the ethnic minorities into the community. However, as it was difficult for ethnic minority students to learn the Chinese Language in schools at the same pace as their Chinese counterparts, EOC considered it appropriate for the Administration to explore the need for the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for ethnic minority students.

7. According to the Administration, 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 to cater for their needs and diversity in learning without creating a labelling effect.

Supplementary Guide

8. Nevertheless, to address the concern of some schools about the lack of a central steer and common standards in the teaching of Chinese for NCS students, the Administration agreed to develop, under the umbrella of the central Chinese Language curriculum framework, a supplementary guide to the Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students (the Guide). The Guide would advise on the selection of key learning targets and objectives related to different strands, and principles of selecting relevant materials and contexts for the different needs of students, including the choice of Putonghua and Cantonese and of simplified and traditional characters. The Administration stressed that the Guide should not be taken as the provision of a simpler Chinese Language curriculum or the setting of lower expectations for NCS students. The Guide would also not be tied to a particular Chinese language examination. NCS students who were capable of following the central Chinese Language curriculum should be encouraged to learn the subject as their local counterparts and sit for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) or the future Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination. NCS students who would prefer to attain alternative qualification(s) in Chinese would have access to the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (Chinese) examination, which was simpler than the Chinese paper in HKCEE or HKDSE by design. The results of students in the (GCSE) (Chinese) examination would be recorded in HKDSE as for other subjects. The Guide had been finalized for uploading in EDB website in late November 2008.

9. While welcoming the development of the Guide, members considered this inadequate and called on the Administration to develop as a long-term goal an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students in the light of the operational experience of the Guide. In the meantime, members considered it imperative to develop and publish teaching materials and textbooks for Chinese Language for NCS students with the following specifications -

- (a) the materials/textbooks should facilitate the progressive delivery of course curriculum, starting from the basics to the more advanced levels, to prepare the NCS students for public examinations in Chinese Language, including GCSE, General Certificate in Education (GCE) and International General

Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE);

- (b) to support NCS students in meeting the learning targets, the materials/textbooks should comprise as many learning modules as possible, each building on the previous level to enable Chinese Language learning on a step-by-step basis;
- (c) the learning modules should be flexibly designed to facilitate the multiple entry and exit of NCS students at various levels; and
- (d) there should be a good interface, in terms of content and standard, of the Chinese textbooks/teaching materials designed for use by primary and secondary schools under the new senior secondary academic structure.

10. Members pointed out that given the small market for Chinese Language textbooks for NCS students, publishers would unlikely embark on such a business. It was necessary for the Administration to provide financial support for publishers in this regard.

11. In the view of the Administration, given the diverse ethnic origins of ethnic minority students, it was more appropriate to develop learning resources for these students based on the teaching and learning materials developed by schools which would serve largely as textbooks. Since 2003, EDB had been sponsoring production projects on Chinese Language teaching resources for NCS students through the Quality Education Fund (QEF). It would produce and disseminate quality teaching materials through adapting QEF projects on teaching materials for Chinese Language developed in Hong Kong school settings. The first set of teaching materials would be ready for publication and dissemination in 2009. A collaborative study with tertiary institutions on Chinese Language standards of NCS students had been launched. Upon the completion of the study by the end of 2008, the Administration would develop internal assessment tools that would help provide feedback on Chinese Language learning by NCS students.

Alternative Chinese Language qualifications for further studies

12. Members considered that in the long run, it was necessary to develop another examination of the Chinese Language, other than HKCEE or HKDSE, which would be recognized by the local universities for admission purpose. It was also necessary for the University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions to specify their required standards in the Chinese Language for admission of NCS students to their undergraduate programmes.

13. According to the Administration, the UGC-funded institutions had currently built in flexibility in the admission process by providing a number of

alternative avenues to admit students without the requisite Chinese Language proficiency. The UGC-funded institutions agreed to offer further flexibility in the application of the general Chinese Language requirement to NCS students who had pursued the local curriculum and who wished to apply for undergraduate programmes under the Joint Universities Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS). With effect from the JUPAS Cycle in 2008, the institutions would be prepared to consider alternative qualifications in Chinese Language, such as those under GCSE, GCE and IGCSE, in lieu of the general Chinese Language requirement based on the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) for JUPAS applicants under the following specified circumstances -

- (a) the student had learned Chinese Language for less than six years while receiving primary and secondary education; or
- (b) the student had learned Chinese Language for six years or more in schools, but had been taught an adapted and simpler curriculum not normally applicable to the majority of students in local schools.

14. Members noted that the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority would accept an award of a Grade D or above attained in the Chinese Language paper of GCSE, GCE or IGCSE as satisfying the corresponding subject requirements at Grade E or Level 2 in HKCEE for the purpose of meeting the HKALE entry qualification. However, the examination results of GCSE, GCE and IGCSE were released normally in late August after the deadline of S6 and university admission. They were concerned about the availability of measures to assist NCS students in this regard.

15. The Administration pointed out that most students attended GCSE, GCE or IGCSE examination at S5, and as such would be able to submit the examination results when applying for admission to undergraduate programmes under JUPAS. As regards admission to S6, starting from 2008, EDB had invited secondary schools to consider giving conditional offers to students satisfying the criteria other than the one on Chinese Language for admission to their S6 classes under specified circumstances, pending the release of GCSE, GCE or IGCSE Chinese Language examination results in late August. In other words, NCS students would be considered for admission to S6 on a par with their Chinese counterparts on the basis of their attainments in other subjects. As at June 2008, more than 80 public sector schools had responded positively to the invitation.

NCS students pursuing further studies

16. Beginning from the 2006-2007 school year, EDB had started to collect information on students' ethnicity and spoken languages at home from P1 to S7

through the annual Student Enrolment Survey. The number of NCS students in public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme Schools by grade in the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years based on the information collected is in **Appendix I**.

17. Members noted with concern that of the 225 NCS students studying in S5 in the 2006-2007 school year, only 212 sat for HKCEE, with 73 having met the minimum requirements for admission to S6. As regards S7, 23 NCS students sat for HKALE, and only six NCS students had been admitted to first-year undergraduate programmes of the UGC-funded institutions in the 2007-2008 academic year. Members considered that NCS students did not have sufficient opportunities to access post-secondary education.

18. The Administration explained that schools and the UGC-funded institutions would take into account NCS students' attainments in Chinese Language in HKCEE and HKALE in considering their applications for admission. Their failure to attain the requisite Chinese Language proficiency might be a reason for the low admission rate. With the agreement of some 80 schools and the UGC-funded institutions to accept alternative Chinese Language qualifications for admission to their S6 classes and undergraduate programmes respectively, NCS students would enjoy better opportunities for access to higher education in future.

Support measures

19. Members were concerned that each designated school currently received a special grant of \$300,000 per annum but non-designated schools with the enrolment of NCS students were not provided with the grant. They queried whether such an arrangement was against the spirit of section 49 of the Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 602) which stipulated that special measures which were reasonably intended to ensure that persons of a particular racial group had equal opportunities as with other persons or to meet their special needs should not be rendered unlawful.

20. According to the Administration, all schools admitting NCS students were provided with resources including grants for remedial teaching, Capacity Enhancement Grant and Student Guidance Service Grant for meeting students' diverse needs. In addition, all schools with intake of newly arrived NCS students were provided with the School-based Support Scheme Grant to run school-based programmes for NCS students. Focused support had been provided to designated schools to assist them in accumulating experience and developing expertise in the teaching and learning of NCS students. This would enable them to serve as anchor points for sharing experience with other schools which had admitted NCS students with a view to facilitating learning effectiveness of NCS students. It was in this context that designated schools were provided with a special grant, and in the Administration's view, this did

not go against the spirit of special measures referred to in section 49 of the Race Discrimination Ordinance.

21. To enhance support for NCS students in education, suggestions had been made for the allocation of vacant school premises to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to run Chinese Language Learning Support Centres and specific remedial programmes after school hours and during holidays for NCS students as well as the provision of tax concession for parents whose NCS children were studying in international schools.

22. The Administration responded that it would continue to focus on enhancing the overall quality of school education and deal with improvement measures requiring additional resources in accordance with the established procedures of resources allocation. It welcomed constructive proposals from NGOs on the operation of Chinese Language Learning Support Centres for NCS students.

NCS students with SEN

23. Members noted that according to the results of the 2006 Population By-census, there were 28 722 full time NCS students in Hong Kong. Assuming that about 5% of school age children had SEN, there should at least be 1 400 NCS students with SEN in Hong Kong. However, according to the information provided by the Administration, there were 164 and 84 NCS students with SEN in public sector ordinary schools and special schools respectively in the 2007-2008 school year. Members were concerned that local schools might be unable to provide NCS students with SEN with proper education because of language barrier. They pointed out that more than 100 NCS students with SEN were on the waiting list for admission to the special school run by the English Schools Foundation (ESF). They urged the Administration to improve support for NCS students with SEN in education.

24. The Administration explained that the Government's policy was to facilitate early integration of NCS students, including students with SEN, into the local education system. Eligible children, irrespective of ethnic origin and physical or intellectual ability, had the right to enjoy basic education in public sector schools. NCS children including those with SEN were encouraged to study in public sector schools so that they could integrate into the local community as early as possible. The Government's role was to ensure an avenue for those NCS students with SEN who would learn better in English to access English-medium learning in the public sector. However, whether the choice of schools available in the public sector met the wish list of individual parents would be another matter. Against this background, the Government had been providing ordinary public sector schools with additional support and resources to cater for the needs of students with SEN, including NCS students. To help the ESF schools address their waiting list problem, the Administration

had exceptionally provided ESF with an additional provision of \$2 million starting from the 2006-2007 school year, which had enabled ESF to operate three additional learning support classes with a provision of 21 new school places for students with SEN. The Administration was exploring the possibility of further enhancing the provision of school places and support for NCS students with SEN in the ESF system.

Employment

25. Members were of the view that the Administration should take the lead in the acceptance of a lower Chinese language proficiency requirement for appointment to certain civil service posts. They requested the Administration to consider accepting the Chinese Language qualifications in GCSE, GCE and IGCSE examinations for appointment purpose. This would enhance the opportunities for ethnic minorities to join the civil service.

26. According to the Administration, EDB had informed the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) of the administration of the GCSE (Chinese) examination in Hong Kong from 2007 onwards for NCS students in the public sector schools. CSB had issued a circular to advise bureaux and Government departments on the acceptance of a Grade D or above attained in the Chinese Language paper of GCSE, GCE or IGCSE examinations as equivalent to a Grade E or Level 2 in HKCEE for appointment to civil service posts. NCS applicants would be considered for civil service appointment as other applicants on a competitive basis. Depending on the job nature, specific or higher requirements in Chinese Language proficiency were specified for individual civil service posts.

Relevant papers

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

**Number of non-Chinese speaking students in public sector and
Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) primary and secondary day schools
by grade in 2006/07 and 2007/08 school years**

Grade	School Year	
	2006/07	2007/08
P1	913	1011
P2	911	1065
P3	839	1006
P4	757	954
P5	606	825
P6	477	722
P1-P6	4503	5583
S1	691	804
S2	609	706
S3	547	642
S4	341	556
S5	225	325
S6	120	136
S7	100	103
S1-S7	2633	3272

Notes

- (1) Figures refer to the position as at September of the respective school years.
- (2) Figures have included NCS students studying in all DSS schools, some of which do not offer the local curriculum. Therefore, some NCS students studying at S5 and S7 in the 2006/07 school year did not participate in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) respectively in 2007. Similarly, some NCS students studying at S5 and S7 in the 2007/08 school year may not participate in the HKCEE and HKALE respectively in 2008.

**Relevant papers on
education for non-Chinese speaking students**

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	23.4.2001 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)46/01-02(01)
Panel on Education	21.6.2004 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda 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 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda 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 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda CB(2)2792/05-06(01)
Panel on Education	8.1.2007 (Item V)	Minutes Agenda
Legislative Council	11.7.2007	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 286 - 360 (Motion)
Panel on Education	18.10.2007	Minutes
Legislative Council	9.1.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 33 - 38 (Question)
Legislative Council	20.2.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 50 - 52 and 65 - 67 (Questions)

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	29.2.2008	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	12.6.2008 (Item IV)	Minutes Agenda
Panel on Education	n/a	Executive Summary of the Report on the Study on Tracking the Adaptation and Development of Non-Chinese Speaking Children in Mainstream Schools [LC Paper No. CB(2)319/08-09(01)]
Legislative Council	3.12.2008	[Written Question 16] Support for schools admitting non-Chinese speaking students Reply
Legislative Council	17.12.2008	[Written Question 11] Non-Chinese speaking students with special educational needs Reply

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 January 2009