



Hong Kong Unison Limited
香港融樂會有限公司

**The Views of Hong Kong Unison towards
Education for non-Chinese Speaking Students**

Dear Honourable Cyd HO and other Panel Members,

We are a Non-Government Organization which aims at the promotion of racial equality and harmony. We believe that education is the basic right of every child and it is an important means to help them get rid of poverty. Hence, fighting for equal education opportunities for ethnic minorities has all along been our major task.

According to Government statistics, there are now over 9,000 ethnic minority secondary and primary students studying in public schools (including Direct Subsidy Scheme schools) in Hong Kong. It is expected that this figure will keep on increasing. We are of the view that if this new generation of human resources is treasured by the community and, like the Chinese students, be given a fair chance of education, they could also make significant contributions to Hong Kong in future.

Unfortunately, ethnic minority students in Hong Kong have all along been facing the problems of lower Chinese standard, limited choices of schools, difficulty of adaptation to school life, and narrow way-out for further education. There is no doubt that, pursuant to the adoption of *Racial Discrimination Ordinance* in summer last year, there is an increase in public attention to the education of ethnic minorities and the resources allocated by the Government have also been increased. However, substantial racial equality is still far far away.

We are pleased to learn that “Education for non-Chinese Speaking Students” would be deliberated in your committee. Taking this opportunity, we would like to raise the following four items that need prior and urgent attention and we also submit proposals for improvement. Hope that you would support our views.

(1) The Learning of Chinese: Teaching and Learning are both Difficult

Lower Chinese language standard has been a long time problem of ethnic minority students in Hong Kong. This has limited their way out for further education, and weakened their





competitiveness in the labour market. The Government has refused to set up a systematic Chinese curriculum for ethnic minority students. Concerned teaching materials and textbooks are also lacked of in the private market. As a result, teachers have to find their way out. Preparation of teaching materials without experience and guidance would not only affect the quality of teaching, but also increase the workload of the teachers. Both the students and teachers would thus be suffered.

Concrete Proposals

Under the striving effort for many years by the concerned parties of ethnic minorities, the Education Bureau published the *Supplementary Guidance to the Chinese Language Curriculum for non-Chinese Speaking Student* in November last year, and undertook to provide Chinese teaching materials to the secondary and primary teachers before the third quarter of this year.

-- However, the provision of guidance only is not enough. What the teacher and students need is a systematic Chinese curriculum that runs through whole study period, i.e., from kindergarten to Form Six. In accordance with different levels of students, learning objectives (i.e. the Chinese level that could be attained) should be set up in each learning stage (such as P.1, P.6, and F.3), and correspondent assessment tools should also be formulated;

-- Regarding the provision of teaching materials to the teachers, the Education Bureau should provide an explicit time-table, and invite academicians (including experts in languages and curriculum, plus other educational experts) to prepare teaching materials together so as to ensure quality and appropriateness of the content of the materials;

-- The abovesaid *Supplementary Guidance* and teaching materials only cover the stages of secondary and primary schools. As we all know, in learning languages, the younger in age the better. The Government should extend the present Chinese language education policy for ethnic minority students to the kindergarten stage so as to let the small children to get in touch with Chinese language as early as possible.



(2) The Examination Fee of Chinese in GCSE is Expensive

In the past, post-secondary institutes subsidized by the University Grants Committee (UGC) required all the under-graduates admitted under JUPAS must have the subject of Chinese passed in HKCEE. This had created an insurmountable obstacle for ethnic minority students in getting into universities. Under the striving effort of ethnic minorities and concerned groups, UGC has consented that, with effect from the next academic year, for the sake of ethnic minority students and other non-Chinese speaking students, the result of a pass in the subject of Chinese in GCSE could be used as a substitute for the subject of Chinese in HKCEE (the content of the former is less difficult than that of the latter). This is no doubt good news to ethnic minority students. However, the examination fee of the subject of Chinese in GCSE is \$965 which is 5 times that of the subject of Chinese in HKCEE, i.e. \$194. As majority of ethnic minority students are from the lower income families, the fee of \$965 is a heavy burden to them.

Concrete Proposal

We propose that the Government should provide financial assistance to those students who sit for examination of the subject of Chinese in GCSE so that they only need to pay the fee equivalent to those of the subjects of Chinese and other languages in HKCEE.

It is noteworthy that, at present, Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority have already provided financial assistance to students who sit for examination of the subject of French in IGCSE. The amount of fee that such students are required to pay for this subject is the same as those for the subjects of Chinese and other languages in HKCEE. We believe that similar arrangements would also be suitable for the subject of Chinese in GCSE.

(3) Extra Support to Mainstream Schools admitting Ethnic minority students

According to Government statistics, there are at present 533 secondary and primary schools admitting non-Chinese speaking students. However, the Government has granted special allowance of \$300,000 to \$600,000 each year to 22 designated schools only. No allowance, not even a cent, has been received by other schools owing to their admission of ethnic minority students.





It is noteworthy that, all along, the Government has not informed explicitly about the criteria to be a “designated school” such as the ratio of the number of ethnic minority students to the total number of students in the school. According to Government statistics, some schools had accepted ethnic minority students up to a ratio of as high as 56-83%, but were still not categorized as designated schools. On the other hand, there is a lack of an objective standard in the Government for calculation of amount of special allowance for schools that have been defined to be designated schools. For example, Pak Kau College in Tin Shui Wai, which has 77 ethnic minority students this year, has been granted a special allowance of \$500,000. In comparison, Delia Broadway School at Mei Foo, which has 792 ethnic minority students, that means 10 times that of the former, has been granted \$600,000 only.

In fact, there is a lack of teachers experienced in teaching ethnic minority students, be it in mainstream schools nor designated schools. Both types of schools need the support from Government. While the Government promotes integrated education and encourages ethnic minority students to study in mainstream schools; she has not rendered support to these schools. Such practices are not just unfair, but also irresponsible.

Furthermore, the Government has recently publicized *the Executive Summary of the Report on the Study on Tracking the Adaptation and Development of Non-Chinese Speaking Children in Mainstream Schools*, conducted by Professor Hau Kit-tai of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Hong Kong Unison finds samples of the study concerned limited (only 31 students were ultimately covered) and this could not reflect the learning situation of ethnic minority students in mainstream schools. In this regard, we strongly object the government’s formulating policy for ethnic minority students studying in mainstream schools upon the study results. (Reference could be made to another paper submitted by this Agency to your Panel concerning our detail views on the abovesaid study, CB(2)579/08-09(08)).

Concrete Proposals

-- The Government should explicitly inform about the criteria for defining a “designated school”. She should specify that such schools are required to have adequate qualified teachers and other facilities in order to teach and support ethnic minority students;





-- The Government should explicitly inform that what guidelines or principles are adopted for the calculation of the amount of special allowance granted to designated schools, in which should include the setting of the amount of allowance in accordance to number of students so as to ensure that needs of schools are met;

-- The Government should provide cash allowance and other support to mainstream schools admitting ethnic minority students. Such arrangement would assist the schools concerned to fully take care of learning needs of the students,

-- In order to have a genuine understanding of the learning situation of ethnic minority students in mainstream schools, we propose that academicians or experts with public credibility be commissioned by the Government to conduct another study of larger scale. This study should lead to a comprehensive and deep understanding of the situation and difficulties faced by ethnic minority students in their primary and secondary schooling and then provide tangible suggestions for improvement.

(4) **Secondary School Place Allocation puts Ethnic Minorities in a Disadvantageous Situation**

For ethnic minority students, one of the most tangible influences brought about by their lower Chinese standard is their disadvantageous position in the secondary school place allocation system. In comparison with their Chinese counterparts, their chance of joining the schools of better banding is slimmer.

Currently, ethnic minority students in P.5 and P.6 are required to take part in internal assessment and be assessed together with their Chinese counterparts. Results in the assessment would directly affect their banding. In case of designated schools, school-based Chinese teaching is implemented from P.1 to P. 4 and ethnic minority students who receive teaching of Chinese in these schools are taught in accordance with their level. However, when they take part in the internal assessment in the second term of P.5, all in a sudden they are required to take the same Chinese examination paper together with Chinese students. In this regard, their study performance would inevitably drop and their banding would subsequently be affected. Furthermore, though ethnic minority students in some schools are allowed to take the less difficult paper, their performance results would ultimately turn out to be failed due to adjustment of marks as a result of their discrepancy with Chinese students.





On the other hand, ethnic minority students studying in mainstream schools receive the teaching of Chinese and attend the same curriculum together with Chinese students. Due to their lower Chinese standard, they are unable to catch up with their Chinese counterparts in academic performance. As teachers are unable to handle great discrepancies between two types of students, they adopt a loose attitude towards ethnic minority students and leave them run their course. At last, these students would be unable to obtain satisfactory results in internal assessment and would thus be allocated to Band 3.

To sum up, we can see the problem of lower Chinese standard of ethnic minority students has not been taken into account in the secondary school place allocation system. These students are hence assessed disproportionately into Band 3, and their chance of getting into Band 1 secondary schools is seriously weakened.

Concrete Proposal

We propose to review the current secondary school places allocation, taking into consideration of lower Chinese standard of ethnic minority students. The possibility of separate assessment on the Chinese paper could be considered. Reasonable adjustment could be made upon assessment on the performance results of ethnic minority students. By so doing, these students, like the Chinese students, would have the chance of getting into schools of better bandings.

As mentioned above, to attain a full scale improvement on the situation faced by ethnic minority students and to achieve genuine racial equality, a lot more can be done. However, we believe that the above four items are the most urgent ones that need to be handled. We hope to obtain your support and we work together for the future and well-being of the children.

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