

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1213/10-11(02)

Ref : CB2/PL/ED

Panel on Education

**Updated background brief
prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 March 2011**

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. The established Government policy is to facilitate early integration of students of ethnic minorities into the local education system. EDB has been providing school placement services to newly-arrived children, including NCS children. 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. Newly-arrived children may choose to enrol into a full-time six-month Initiation Programme prior to their entry to mainstream schools. Those who choose to enter mainstream schools direct will be provided with a part-time 60-hour Induction Programme operated by non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"). Public-sector schools and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme ("DSS") admitting

these children will be provided with a School-based Support Scheme Grant to operate school-based support programmes.

Deliberations of the Panel

3. The Panel has discussed the subject of the provision of education for ethnic minorities at a number of meetings. The major concerns raised by members include the provision of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students, opportunities for post-secondary education for these students, support measures and education for NCS students with special educational needs ("SEN"). The deliberations of the Panel are summarized in the following paragraphs.

An alternative Chinese Language curriculum

4. There is currently 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.

5. 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.

6. 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

7. 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 had developed, under the umbrella of the central Chinese Language curriculum framework, a supplementary guide to the Chinese Language curriculum for NCS students ("the Guide") which had been distributed to schools in December 2008. The Guide advised 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 was also not 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 Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination. NCS students who preferred to attain alternative qualification(s) in Chinese had access to the General Certificate of Secondary Education

("GCSE") (Chinese) examination, which was simpler than the Chinese paper in HKDSE by design. The results of students in the GCSE (Chinese) examination would be recorded in HKDSE as for other subjects.

8. While welcoming the availability 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.

9. 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.

10. 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 learning materials, covering primary to secondary levels, and the teaching reference materials including various learning software and Chinese lexical items with English explanations for use in Hong Kong schools were distributed to schools in 2009. A collaborative study with tertiary institutions on Chinese Language standards of NCS students had been launched. Upon the completion of the study in 2009, the Administration would develop internal assessment tools that would help provide feedback on Chinese Language learning by NCS students. The development of the assessment tools was expected to complete in 2010.

Alternative Chinese Language qualifications for further studies

11. Members considered it necessary in the long run to develop another examination of the Chinese Language, other than HKDSE, which would be recognized by 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.

12. According to the Administration, the UGC-funded institutions had provided further flexibility for the acceptance of alternative Chinese Language qualifications for application under the Joint Universities Programmes Admissions System ("JUPAS") from 2008 onwards. With effect from the JUPAS Cycle in 2008, the institutions had started 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 subject to specified circumstances. The UGC-funded institutions had agreed to continue to accept alternative Chinese Language qualification(s) for students fulfilling the specified circumstances under the new senior secondary curriculum.

Opportunities for further studies

13. Members noted that 316 NCS students had taken the 2008 Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. Among these candidates, 124 met the minimum requirements for S6 admission in the 2008-2009 school year but only 84 studied in S6 classes in the public sector and DSS

schools. A total of 24 NCS students sat for HKALE in the same school year, but only six of the 10 NCS students having been offered a place under JUPAS accepted the offer. Members suggested that the Administration should conduct a tracking survey to analyze the reasons of NCS students for rejecting the offer for post-secondary education.

14. According to the Administration, it had launched a longitudinal study in November 2008 and, based on the findings of the study, would review the strategies and methods for enhancing learning effectiveness of NCS students at different levels. To facilitate NCS students who might prefer having an alternative Chinese qualification, the Administration had been administering the GCSE (Chinese) Examination through HKEAA.

15. As NCS students had to pay more than \$900 for taking the GCSE (Chinese) examination, members requested the Administration to lower the examination fee. Members were informed by the Administration that HKEAA had undertaken to consider the matter in its annual review of examination fees. A reduction of fee level for the GCSE (Chinese) examination might be likely when the number of candidates sitting for the examination increased.

Support measures

16. Members were concerned that each designated school currently received a special grant but non-designated schools with NCS students were not provided with any grant designated for assisting NCS students. Some members considered that schools admitting NCS students should be provided with additional resources on a per capita basis, irrespective of whether they were designated schools. However, members noted the downside of such a proposal as schools with a small number of NCS students at each level would have little resources for effective use. It was suggested that EDB should sponsor NGOs to provide after-school learning support classes in Chinese Language for NCS students attending these schools. Members also considered the criteria and objectives for allocating the special grant unclear. In members' view, the special grant should be used mainly for employing additional Chinese Language teachers or teaching assistants to assist NCS students in learning Chinese Language instead of developing teaching and learning materials for NCS students.

17. 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 their learning effectiveness. Starting from the 2008-2009 school year, the special grant for designated schools had become recurrent and the annual amount of the grant ranging from \$300,000 to \$600,000 was allocated on the basis of the number of NCS students admitted by the designated schools. The Administration assured members that it had been monitoring the use of the special grant by designated schools. Individual schools used the grant according to the needs of their NSC students. Some of them had used the additional resources for employing teaching assistants and some for the development of school-based teaching and learning materials for dissemination to other schools.

18. As there was no ceiling on the number of designated schools, members called on the Administration to encourage the non-designated schools meeting the prescribed criteria to become designated schools so that they would be eligible for the special grant. Members were of the view that the criteria for selecting designated schools should be more specific and the admission of a certain number of NCS students should be one of such criteria.

19. According to the Administration, in selecting additional designated schools, it would take into account the spread of NCS students in the districts, the experiences and capability of the schools to take care of NCS students, and their readiness to partner with EDB in the development of reference materials for teaching and learning of NCS students. The number of designated schools had been increased from 15 in the 2006-2007 school year to 28 in the 2010-2011 school year.

20. To provide more opportunities for NCS students to learn Chinese Language outside classroom, members considered that the Administration should formulate a policy direction and allocate resources for the conduct of after-school activities for NCS students.

21. The Administration explained that it had provided resources for schools to organize a wide variety of after-school activities to help NCS students to integrate into the local communities. It had commissioned

the University of Hong Kong to operate the Chinese Language Learning Support Centres to provide after-school classes to NCS. In the 2008-2009 school year, there were a total of eight such centres operating at different locations. The number of NCS students admitted to these Centres had increased from 250 to 326, including 42 students from non-designated schools. Starting from the 2010-2011 school year, funding had been set aside for eligible non-designated schools to participate in the Project of After-school Extended Chinese Learning to implement school-based after-school extended Chinese learning programmes for NCS students. To help the NCS parents and students understand the school system, major education policies and the related education services, the Administration had prepared the Non-Chinese Speaking Parent Information Package in major ethnic minority languages and distributed it to NCS parents through schools, Maternal and Child Health Centres, NGOs and relevant Government bureaux/departments.

NCS students with SEN

22. 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 the 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 only 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"). Members urged the Administration to improve support for NCS students with SEN in education.

23. 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.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
10 March 2011

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

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	23.4.2001 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)46/01-02(01)
Panel on Education	21.6.2004 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes 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)	Agenda Minutes 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)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)2792/05-06(01)
Panel on Education	8.1.2007 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
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 55 - 57 (Question)

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	20.2.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 62 - 66 and 84 - 88 (Questions)
Panel on Education	29.2.2008 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	12.6.2008 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
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
Legislative Council	3.12.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 92 - 99 (Question)
Legislative Council	17.12.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 76 - 78 (Question)
Panel on Education	12.1.2009 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Education	14.10.2010	Minutes CB(2)235/10-11(01)

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