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Panel on Education

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 12 December 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.

Deliberations of the Panel

3. The Panel has discussed the subject of the provision of education for ethnic minorities at a number of meetings. It received a briefing by the Administration on the progress of support measures for NCS students at the meeting on 14 March 2011. The major concerns raised by members are summarized below.

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. 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.

Teaching and learning materials for the Chinese Language for NCS students

7. 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 the Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for NCS students ("the Supplementary Guide") in 2008, under the umbrella of the central Chinese Language curriculum framework with a view to enabling schools to help their NCS students learn progressively based on their diverse aspirations, needs and learning pace.

8. While welcoming the availability of the Supplementary 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. The materials/textbooks should comprise different learning modules to facilitate the progressive delivery of course curriculum, to prepare the NCS students for public examinations in Chinese Language, including the General Certificate of Secondary Education ("GCSE") Examination, and the learning modules should be flexibly designed to facilitate the multiple entry and exit of NCS students at various levels. 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.

9. 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"). The Administration, through adapting the QEF projects, had developed two sets of teaching and learning materials in Chinese Language for NCS students covering primary to secondary

levels which were dispatched free of charge to schools in 2009 and 2010 for use by teachers and NCS students. The Administration had also commissioned a university to develop assessment tools that would help provide feedback to NCS students in their learning of the Chinese Language. These assessment tools had been uploaded on the EDB's website in December 2010 for use by schools.

Alternative Chinese Language qualifications for further studies

10. Members considered it necessary in the long run to develop another examination of the Chinese Language, other than the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination, 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. There was also a view that there should be a Chinese Language benchmark examination with appropriate programmes for NCS students to attain the required qualifications in Chinese Language for further studies and employment. The benchmark examination should be divided into different levels to facilitate NCS students to obtain the qualifications in stages.

11. In the view of the Administration, 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 HKDSE Examination. NCS students who preferred to attain alternative qualification(s) in Chinese had access to GCSE (Chinese) Examination, which was simpler than the Chinese paper in HKDSE by design. The results of students in the GCSE (Chinese) Examination were internationally recognised and accepted as an alternative Chinese qualification for consideration for admission to UGC-funded institutions through the Joint Universities Programmes Admissions System ("JUPAS") since 2008.

12. As GCSE (Chinese) Examination was an overseas examination, its examination fee was relatively high. Members requested the Administration to lower the examination fee. According to the Administration, it had started subsidizing the eligible NCS students to take GCSE (Chinese) Examination since the 2010 sitting. The funding incurred in the 2010-2011 school year for subsidising eligible school candidates sitting the GCSE (Chinese) Examination was about \$0.26 million. To ensure that eligible NCS students in need would not be

deprived of the opportunity to sit for the examination to obtain an alternative qualification in Chinese Language, the Administration had extended the ambit of the Examination Fee Remission Scheme to cover GCSE (Chinese) Examination from the 2011-2012 school year. An NCS student who passed the means test for student financial assistance would be eligible to receive full or half fee remission of the examination fee payable for taking GCSE (Chinese) Examination.

13. Some members raised concern about the changes recently introduced to the GCSE (Chinese) Examination. The new GCSE (Chinese) Examination involved school-based assessment ("SBA") and therefore would only be offered to candidates of schools which had registered as sub-centres of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority ("HKEAA"). There was concern that private candidates would not be able to sit for the examination under the new system. Members considered it necessary for the Administration to collaborate with the schools concerned to render assistance to private students to complete SBA and take part in the GCSE (Chinese) Examination.

14. The Administration explained that given that SBA was an important component of modern public examinations, the examination authorities concerned would take account of private candidates and make appropriate adjustments to the assessments, like what HKEAA did in handling the HKDSE. Members were advised that HKEAA had been liaising with the examination board of GCSE (Chinese) in this regard.

Pilot scheme on Workplace Chinese Language

15. At the Panel meeting on 14 March 2011, members generally welcomed the Administration's proposal to launch a pilot scheme on Workplace Chinese Language to enhance NCS students' employability. Members noted that to further support NCS students who could not attain any acceptable level in terms of Chinese proficiency under the HKDSE to meet the workplace or trade-specific requirements, the Administration planned to conduct a Pilot Scheme on Workplace Chinese Language for implementation in the 2011-2012 school year. The programmes of the proposed scheme would be designed to be trade-specific and pegged at Levels 1 to 3 of the Qualifications Framework with validation by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications. Members considered it important for the Government to demonstrate its commitment to offering employment opportunities to ethnic minorities to set a good example to other employers. The

Administration was requested to provide information on the civil service posts for which ethnic minority students on completion of the Workplace Chinese Language programmes were eligible to apply when it reported to the Panel on the implementation details of the pilot scheme.

Opportunities for further studies and employment for NCS students

16. Members noted that the number of NCS students sitting for GCSE (Chinese) Examination had progressively increased to about 190 in 2011, as compared with 10 in 2007 when the examination was first administered in Hong Kong for NCS students. Out of these 190 students, about 170 had attained the alternative Chinese qualification. In 2011, 17 out of 64 NCS students studying in S7 of public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools who sat for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination had received offers under JUPAS. Separately, about 250 NCS students were taking full-time locally accredited self-financing degree or sub-degree programmes.

17. At the request of members, the Administration had provided information on the employment statistics of NCS graduates of the Vocational Training Council ("VTC"). In the 2009-2010 academic year, about 75% of those who had completed dedicated courses for NCS students pitched at post-secondary 3 and 5 level of one year or more provided by VTC pursued further studies in VTC or other local institutions. Some 95% of the rest of these graduates secured employment. The average employment rate of VTC's graduates from pre-employment programmes excluding those who pursued further studies in VTC or other local institutions was about 87% in the 2009-2010 academic year.

After-school support in Chinese learning

18. Members were of the view that the Administration should encourage ethnic minority children to have an early start in learning the Chinese Language in kindergartens. To provide more opportunities for NCS students to learn the 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. 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 Centre ("the Centre") to provide after-school

classes to NCS students. In the 2010-2011 school year, there were a total of 11 designated venues for the Centre, with an enrolment of 482 students. Furthermore, as an initiative in the 2010 Budget, the Administration had piloted a three-year project of After-school Extended Chinese Learning under which non-designated schools might seek funds to put in place extended Chinese learning programmes for NCS students. In the 2010-2011 school year, 62 non-designated schools had been provided with funding in the range of \$0.05 to \$0.3 million (depending on the number of NCS students enrolled for the project) offering after-school support for about 2 300 students, i.e. about half of the NCS students in non-designated schools.

19. Members considered that students might lose interest in attending these after-school classes if they were conducted in their own schools and suggested that the Administration should explore the feasibility of engaging different organizations to offer after-school remedial classes to provide more options and flexibility for NCS students in choosing a venue which best suited them with a view to enhancing their interest and motivation in attending the classes. The Administration advised members that NCS students were free to choose after-school programmes at their own schools or other venues and undertook to critically examine the need for more venues as suggested by members.

Designated schools

20. 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. 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.

21. 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. Individual schools used the grant according to the needs of their NCS 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.

22. 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 transparent and the admission of a certain number of NCS students should be one of such criteria. Some members suggested that there should be two types of designated schools to cater for the different needs of NCS students. One type of designated schools should be those admitting mainly students of ethnic minorities, while the other should admit a certain number of NCS students only.

23. According to the Administration, in selecting additional designated schools, it would take into account the capability of schools to provide a full curriculum, 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 increased from 15 in the 2006-2007 school year to 28 in the 2010-2011 school year. In 11 of these designated schools, the number of NCS students constituted more than 70% of the total number of students. As for the remaining 17 designated schools, the percentage of NCS students varied, ranging from 10% to 70%. The Administration was positive towards having more schools to become designated schools.

24. Some members pointed out that given the limited number of schools suitable for ethnic minority students, some of these students, in particular those living in the New Territories such as Tin Shui Wai and Tuen Mun, had to spend a long time in travelling and bear high transportation expenses. Members suggested that the Administration should review its existing school nets and school placement arrangement for NCS students to facilitate NCS students to enrol in schools near their home.

25. The Administration advised members that it had been keeping track of the number of ethnic minority students enrolled in local schools every school year. In response to NCS parents' wish to send their children to local schools, the P1 and S1 student allocation systems had been revamped to the effect that NCS students could choose schools in their own school net alongside the local parents and they were also given access to the schools traditionally admitting a large number of NCS students. Some NCS parents might prefer to send their children to designated schools. There were two (one primary and one secondary) designated schools in Tuen Mun and four (two primary schools and two secondary schools) in Yuen Long.

NCS students with special educational needs ("SEN")

26. Members were also concerned about the adequacy of school places in special schools for NCS students with SEN. Members pointed out that local schools might be unable to provide NCS students with SEN with proper education because of language barrier. Noting 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.

27. 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. 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.

28. In addition to a special school with 30 primary school places and 30 secondary school places and 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 would explore the possibility of further enhancing the provision of school places and support for NCS students with SEN in the ESF system.

Recent developments

29. The Policy and Research Committee under the EOC set up a Working Group ("WG") in July 2010 to deal with concerns about the barriers ethnic minority students encountered in their academic pursuit, especially in the learning of Chinese, with a view to exploring possible measures to provide these students with a level playing field in the education system and eventually in the employment market. The Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities was submitted to EDB in March 2011.

30. At the upcoming Panel meeting on 12 December 2011, the Administration will brief members on the progress and way forward for education support for NCS students, in particular the measures relating to Chinese learning, in the light of the Report of the WG. EOC has also been invited to the meeting to brief members on the Report of WG.

Relevant papers

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

**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 33 - 38 (Question)

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	20.2.2008	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 50 - 52 and 65 - 67 (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)
Panel on Education	14.3.2011	Agenda Minutes CB(2)1927/10-11(01)
Legislative Council	2.11.2011	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 77 - 80 (Question)
Legislative Council	16.11.2011	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 72 - 76 (Question)