

Written Response to the Submission from Hong Kong Unison Limited

Our response to the issues and recommendations raised in the submission from Hong Kong Unison Limited (Unison) is set out below.

Concentration of Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) students in a few kindergartens (KGs)

2. The Government is committed to encouraging and supporting integration of NCS students⁴, notably ethnic minority (EM) students, into the community, including facilitating their early adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese language. On KG education, the KG sector has been characterised by its flexibility, diversity and responsiveness to parental needs. All along, parents have autonomy in choosing a KG suitable for their children with regard to their needs and preference while KGs, being privately run, may handle student admission matters at their discretion subject to prevailing regulations, rules and guidelines issued by the Education Bureau (EDB). According to available figures, quite a number of KGs have admitted NCS students. In the 2014/15 school year, there were about 11 900 NCS students studying in some 560 KGs (around 76% offering local curriculum, 20% non-local curriculum and 4% both), accounting for 57% of all KGs in Hong Kong. Among 7 000 NCS students studying in local KGs, about 5 000 (over 70%) were in Pre-Primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) KGs. These students were distributed in some 380 PEVS KGs (that is, over 50% of all PEVS KGs) in all 18 districts in Hong Kong. While we note that a small number of these PEVS KGs have more than 50% of their student enrolment being NCS due to their unique cultural and religious background and parental choice, there is no evidence that shows “racial segregation” as indicated in the submission.

3. With regard to the Unison’s recommendation that “EDB monitor the ratio of EM students in all KGs to prevent *de facto* racial segregation”, we have to be mindful that this would in effect limit the choice of some NCS parents and may constitute discrimination against them. It is considered

⁴ For the planning of educational support measures, students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese are broadly categorised as NCS students.

more practicable and desirable to enhance the guidelines and support for schools to ensure that NCS students have equal opportunity to gain admission to KGs. For details, please see paragraphs 4 to 5 below.

Admission and Support

4. To ensure equal education opportunity for all children regardless of their race, gender and ability, EDB has advised schools via different channels, including school circular and briefing sessions that their school-based admission mechanism should be fair, just and open, and in compliance with the existing legislation (including the anti-discrimination ordinances like Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO)) as well as circulars and guidelines issued by EDB. KGs are required to inform parents in advance of the details of their school-based admission mechanism through effective channels (e.g. guidance notes in application forms, admission guidelines/leaflets, school website, etc.). Besides, KGs should put in place an effective means of communication and provide assistance (such as translation and/or interpretation) to students/parents as far as possible. In mid-June this year when the briefing sessions on admission arrangements were conducted, the EDB also invited representatives from Equal Opportunities Commission to share with KGs the important points to note in admission arrangements and to promote the understanding of the RDO in the sector. Briefing sessions will be arranged in districts that have more NCS families. We have started and will continue to explore various means to increase the awareness of various anti-discrimination ordinances among all KGs. KGs should provide timely response to parents' enquiries about admission arrangements. Parents in need of information on KG admission or wish to lodge related complaints may approach our Regional Education Offices or Joint Office for KGs and Child Care Centres for assistance.

Accessibility to information

5. EDB has been trying to help parents (including NCS parents) make an informed choice of KG for their children. Various information materials regarding KG education and admission arrangements are publicised in different ethnic languages. Simultaneous interpretation service is also provided in some parent seminars to cater for the NCS parents. The Profile of KGs and KG-cum-Child Care Centres (KG Profile) updated and issued annually contains basic information of individual KGs (such as school name,

address, telephone, approved school fees, information of student enrolment, serving teachers, etc.) as well as information provided by KGs (such as school facilities, curriculum details, school characteristics, etc.). All the basic information in the KG Profile is provided in both the Chinese and the English language. While the information about school facilities, curriculum and characteristics is currently provided only in Chinese, we plan to provide also the English version starting from the 2016/17 school year to facilitate NCS parents to acquire as much information as possible through the KG Profile. We will also explore ways to promote KG education to a wider NCS community in collaboration with non-government organizations in future.

Quality assurance

6. With the roll-out of the PEVS in 2007, all KGs under PEVS are required to conduct ongoing school self-evaluation and undergo quality review (QR) for sustainable school development and accountability purposes. When conducting QR, inspectors from EDB will evaluate KGs' performance with reference to the Performance Indicators (Pre-primary Institutions), including KGs' support to NCS students. For example, in the domain of "Learning and Teaching", inspectors will review how KGs design their teaching programmes to suit children's abilities and meet their needs, adapt their teaching methods to address children's needs and varied abilities, and cater for individual differences of children in their learning. We will also assess whether teachers' explanations, instructions and demonstrations are geared to children's needs and whether the teachers understand their needs, etc. In the domain of "Support to Children and School Culture", inspectors will review how KGs identify and support children with learning difficulties, help children adapt to school life and communicate with the NCS children's families, etc. Apart from evaluating KGs' performance in supporting NCS students, professional advice will also be given to KGs to further enhance their existing measures.

Additional funding to KGs admitting NCS students

7. It is noteworthy that one of the KG Committee's recommendations is to provide additional assistance, in the form of a grant comparable to the salary of a KG teacher, for KGs admitting a cluster of NCS students (say eight students or more) to enable them to enhance the support for these students. With the additional resources, KGs could provide teachers with professional training and development in the areas of culture, language and diversity, and

develop effective strategies to help NCS students learn through the Chinese medium, so as to lay a foundation for their study in primary schools. KGs could also deploy the additional resources to enhance the communication with the parents of NCS students and strengthen home-school cooperation. We are considering the proposal. The views of Unison in this respect will also be taken into consideration in our formulation of the future policy.