



13 April 2016

**Hong Kong Unison's Views on
Free Kindergarten Policy regarding ethnic minority children**

Purpose

Hong Kong Unison has met Education Bureau at the Free Kindergarten Policy Briefing for NGOs on 14 March, 2016. We would like to take this opportunity to share our views on how Free Kindergarten Policy is going to help ethnic minority children to build a more solid base in Chinese acquisition for better integration in the future.

Background

1. We all agree that kindergarten is the first step for a non-Chinese speaking (NCS) child to learn Chinese; thus a Chinese learning environment should be adopted. We trust that your Bureau would want NCS students to be widely distributed as much as we do. To ensure that this happens, (i) sufficient resources and support in school, (ii) trained teachers and frontline kindergarten staffs, (iii) fair admission mechanisms, (iv) information to parents, and (v) good communication process between schools and parents are necessary.

Funding to KG with 8 or more NCS children

2. In the Free Kindergarten Policy, schools admitting 8 or more NCS children are eligible for a funding equivalent to the salary of one KG teacher (approximately HK\$25,000 per month). We would like to know if EDB will disburse the funds to eligible kindergartens automatically or do kindergartens have to apply for this funding with a proposal/plan to utilize these resources.

3. With reference from the primary and secondary school situation, schools with NCS students may need guidance on how they can make the best use of available resources and funding to help NCS children adapt to a Chinese learning environment. We suggest the Bureau to provide a guide which consolidates current resources for NCS children in KG and guidance from the Bureau on how this funding can be utilized. It should be given to kindergartens together with the funding application forms.



KG with less than 8 NCS children

4. Kindergartens with less than 8 NCS students which are not able to get any funding may perceive admitting NCS children as taking up additional school resources. We urge the Bureau to provide more school-based support to these schools and perhaps network in each district to better coordinate resources from the Bureau.

New HKIED programme on leaders of teaching NCS

5. During the briefing, it was mentioned that the Bureau is working with HKIED on developing a new course in teaching NCS students to prepare leaders in the field. As the Deputy Secretary for Education (3), Mrs. Michelle Wong, commented that the caring of NCS children should not be the responsibility of one teacher only but all staff in kindergartens, we look forward to the “teaching of NCS students” as a compulsory component in the ECE programme instead of a separate course.

Cue cards

6. Unison appreciates the Bureau’s idea of producing cue cards to enhance basic communications between parents and teachers. However, it is highly recommended that these cards be used only between parents and teachers and not between teachers and students, so as to maintain a Chinese learning environment in schools.

Fair and just admission mechanism and admin guidelines

7. Unison has been advocating fair and non-discriminatory admission mechanism. At the briefing, the Bureau stated the importance of a fair admission procedure and advised parents to report to the Bureau of “mal-practices”. For a more efficient and effective system, we suggest it is mandatory that all free kindergartens develop clear and transparent admission policy to enhance equal admission opportunities.

8. Moreover, we urge the Bureau to develop administrative guidelines for free kindergartens, including non-discriminatory practices for NCS children e.g. allowing interpretation service or bringing someone to communicate with schools



during interviews, forbidding segregation between Chinese and NCS children either in different classes or different sessions, and providing translation to Chinese notices etc. to prevent discrimination against ethnic minority children.

Information to NCS parents

9. Unison is delighted to know that a full version of English Kindergarten Profile will be published for 2016/17 school year and available in various support centres and NGOs which serve ethnic minorities. Currently NGOs are advised to request not more than 20 copies of the kindergarten profile in total due to limited budget as stated in the EDB email. We hope the Bureau provides enough copies for parents to take them home so they can read thoroughly and better understand the kindergartens. Please kindly bear in mind that the Kindergarten Profiles remain one of the very few (paid or free) resources in English for NCS parents.

Required information in the Kindergarten Profiles

10. Under 'School Characteristics' in the Kindergarten Profile, we welcome the EDB's efforts to encourage kindergartens to fill in support to NCS children in "Support to Students". We will continue to observe if there is more relevant information in the coming profile. Hope this measure can facilitate more informed choices for the parents.

Smooth communication process in home-school cooperation

11. NCS parents reflect that one of the biggest challenges they face in mainstream kindergartens is communication, especially when school notices are mainly in Chinese. Even when teachers are willing to translate key-points of notices, we heard management, i.e. principals, think differently. They believe "NCS are well informed that it is a local Chinese school before enrolling their child" and hence no need to provide translation. Thus we urge the EDB to establish a set of bilingual school notice templates for kindergartens to ease administrative burden.