



中華人民共和國香港特別行政區政府總部教育局

Education Bureau

Government Secretariat, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
The People's Republic of China

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27 May 2021

Clerk to Public Accounts Committee,  
Legislative Council Complex,  
1 Legislative Council Road,  
Central, Hong Kong  
(Attn: Ms Wendy JAN)

Dear Ms JAN,

**Public Accounts Committee**

**Consideration of Chapter 2 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 76  
Education support measures for non-Chinese speaking students**

Your letters to the Secretary for Education dated 12 and 18 May 2021 on the  
captioned subject were well received. Please find the English version of our  
responses to the questions set out in the Appendices of your letters.

For enquiries, please contact the undersigned on 3509 8505.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Yung'.

( Benjamin YUNG )  
for Secretary for Education

c.c. Secretary of Financial Services and the Treasury (email: [sfst@fstb.gov.hk](mailto:sfst@fstb.gov.hk))  
Director of Audit (email: [john\\_nc\\_chu@aud.gov.hk](mailto:john_nc_chu@aud.gov.hk))

**Public Accounts Committee  
Consideration of Chapter 2 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 76  
Education support measures for non-Chinese speaking students**

**Response from the Education Bureau**

**Part 2: Funding support to schools**

Enhanced support measures for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students are intended to provide additional resources to complement the wide array of funding already made available to schools in delivering their education services for their students (including but not limited to NCS students). Schools are encouraged, but not mandated to exhaust the additional funding and resources, to make the best use of these additional support measures that best meet the needs of the schools and their NCS students.

The additional funding support for NCS students ("NCS Grant") is a grant provided to schools for specific purposes, i.e. to enhance their support for NCS students' learning of Chinese and to create an inclusive learning environment in schools. The Education Bureau (EDB) requires schools to establish effective financial management process to deploy their resources in a cost-effective and timely manner, and ensure that the expenditures incurred are reasonable and necessary for education purposes. We also encourage schools to holistically plan and exercise flexibility in deploying various resources available to support their NCS students having regard to the specific circumstances and needs of their students. To enable schools to have the flexibility in resource management and operational planning, schools are allowed to retain different school grants (including the NCS Grant), up to an accumulated level not exceeding the total provision of the respective grant for the school year. Most of the schools receiving the NCS Grant have made good use of the resources. In the 2018/19 school year, out of the total funding amount of \$327.8 million allocated, about \$298.8 million (i.e. 91%) had been fully utilised by schools.

Our response to the Public Accounts Committee's questions on Part 2 of Chapter 2 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 76 are in the ensuing paragraphs.

- 1) According to paragraph 2.8 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 76 ("Audit Report"), in the 2018/2019 school year (other than calendar years, all years mentioned hereinafter refer to school years), of the 152 kindergartens (KGs) receiving the NCS Grant, 60 (39%) submitted their school plans late and 73 (48%) submitted their school reports late. In the same year, of the 266 primary, secondary and special schools receiving the Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million, 168 (63%) submitted their school plans late and 176 (66%) submitted their school reports late. Please advise:
- (a) the reasons for schools submitting their school plans and school reports late;
  - (b) whether the delays had affected the efficiency and effectiveness of the EDB's efforts in providing professional advice and support to schools on their planning and implementation of support measures for NCS students; and
  - (c) the measures taken by EDB to ensure that schools submit their school plans and school reports in a more timely manner and whether the timeliness of the submissions has improved.

#### EDB's response

- (a) Primary, secondary and special schools receiving the NCS Grant are required to submit to EDB an annual school plan and school report concerning the support for NCS students by end of November every year. As noted in the Audit Report, most late submissions were delayed by less than a month. As gathered from some schools with belated submissions of school plans and school reports, they might have taken more time than anticipated to complete the administrative work in finalising the school plans and school reports. Such work include collecting the student data of the new intake each year, verifying the NCS student data with parents for the calculation of the NCS Grant, identifying the learning needs and Chinese proficiency of these NCS students through assessments in order to devise appropriate support measures. Some schools might encounter delay in completing the formality to have the school plans and school reports properly endorsed by their Incorporated Management Committees (IMCs)/School Management Committees (SMCs), the first meeting of which is normally convened in October to November. It was also noted that the first-timers for receiving the NCS Grant might usually spend an even longer time to complete all the work required.

As for KGs, we understand from some KGs that some belated submissions were due to insufficient manpower and experience in handling the administrative work in time, especially in the initial years of implementing the new KG education scheme (Scheme). These duties include setting up

new systems in budgeting, accounting, procurements, etc. to meet requirements under the Scheme; submission of applications for various grants; determining remuneration packages for teachers; formulation of school-based support measures, etc. Given the high mobility of students (including NCS students) in the KG sector throughout the school year, some KGs had to revise their plan after the commencement of the school year and seek fresh endorsement from the school management committee/school operators as necessary. For the school reports which include the report on the use of the NCS Grant, some KGs were working under a tight schedule as they could only finalise the report upon the finalisation of their school accounts for the school year after 31 August.

- (b) It is an on-going and interactive process for EDB to engage in professional dialogues with the schools receiving the NCS Grant about the support measures rendered to NCS students. The monitoring and support work of EDB commences at the very beginning of every school year. For instance, EDB arranges visits to primary and secondary schools receiving the NCS Grant the first time the soonest possible at the beginning of the school year and provides these schools with intensive support and guidance. Hence, the requirement for schools to submit planning and reporting documents is just part of EDB's monitoring and support mechanism. Individual schools' delays in submitting school plans and school reports do not affect EDB's effort in providing professional advice and support to schools because the timeframe for disbursement of the NCS Grant is effected as scheduled, and EDB continues to monitor the support for NCS students through school visits, and daily communication with the schools.
  - (c) In light of the recommendations of the Audit Report, we will continue our efforts to remind schools to closely observe the timeliness in submitting the school plans and school reports. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, we will further highlight the importance of timely submission of school plans and school reports in our official correspondence with the primary, secondary and special schools and KGs concerned. We also plan to introduce a new measure to require primary, secondary and special schools receiving the NCS Grant to submit in writing the reasons for belated submissions of school reports and/or school plans for 14 calendar days or more. For belated cases without justifiable reasons or repeated late submissions, we may issue advisory letters to the IMCs/SMCs of the schools concerned as appropriate.
- 2) According to paragraph 2.10 of the Audit Report, in the 2018/2019 school year, a total amount of \$327.8 million of NCS Grant was provided to 650 schools. Of this amount, \$298.8 million (91%) was utilised by the schools. In the same school year, EDB clawed back from 45 schools \$2.44 million of unutilised NCS Grant. As schools are allowed to retain unutilised Grant up to the amount of Grant for the school year, although the amount of Grant clawed

back was not large, the amount of unutilised Grant retained by schools was much greater. Please advise:

- (a) the total amount of unutilised NCS Grant retained by the schools at the end of the 2018/2019 school year;
- (b) whether EDB considers the situation of 45 schools with unutilised NCS Grant exceeding the amount of Grant for the school year not satisfactory;
- (c) whether EDB had ascertained why some schools had large amount of unutilised Grant;
- (d) whether EDB was satisfied that the under-spending of the Grant by these schools were fully justified; and
- (e) whether EDB had provided any professional advice and support to these schools on their planning and implementation of support measures for NCS students.

EDB's response

- (a) At the end of the 2018/19 school year, the approximate aggregate and average sums of the NCS Grant retained (including the cumulative surplus carried forward from previous years) are as follows:

Types of KG/Schools	NCS grant retained	
	Aggregate sums	Per school/KG
KGs	\$16.27 million	\$130,000
primary/secondary/special schools receiving \$50,000	\$5.54 million	\$30,000
primary/secondary/special schools receiving \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million	\$101 million	\$400,000

- (b) to (d)

In the 2018/19 school year, the 45 schools which had retained NCS Grant exceeding the amount of Grant for the school year accounted for only less than 7% of all funding schools. Amongst these 45 schools, two KGs were involved and the total amount clawed back was small, i.e. around \$30,000. A total of eight schools received the additional funding ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million, including two schools requiring clawback arrangements due to cessation of school operation. The remaining schools received only \$50,000. In other words, these schools had retained a relatively small amount of funding. The major reasons cited by the schools for the under-spending were that the cost of after-school Chinese language support programmes was relatively low and the additional funding was merely used to procure related learning and teaching materials, and that there were difficulties in service procurement and recruiting suitable part-time tutors for

the after-school programmes and/or additional teaching staff. Overall, EDB considers schools' explanations not entirely unreasonable.

- (e) Schools are provided with a comprehensive framework as well as proper guidance for planning and monitoring their funding utilisation and implementation of support measures. Through scrutiny of school plans and reports, daily liaisons with schools and school visits, EDB provides on-going professional advice and support to schools regarding whether the funding has been deployed within the ambit of the NCS Grant and whether schools should make better use of the Grant.
- 3) According to paragraph 2.11 of the Audit Report, of the 137 KGs that were provided with the NCS Grant in both the 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 school years, 20 (15%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the two-year period. Of the 41 primary, secondary and special schools that were provided with the Grant of \$50,000 in all the years over the period from the 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 school years, seven (17%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the whole period. According to paragraphs 2.12(b) and 2.13 of the Audit Report, EDB has agreed to step up monitoring of the utilisation of NCS Grant by schools and encourage schools with unjustified under-spending to make good use of the Grant to support NCS students as far as possible. Please advise the actions taken and whether EDB had noticed any cases of unjustified under-spending.

#### EDB's response

Overall, EDB considers schools' explanations for under-spending not entirely unreasonable. In view of the Audit Commission's recommendations, EDB will step up the monitoring of schools admitting a relatively small number of NCS students in their funding utilisation. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, if the surplus situation of such schools reaches 70% or above of the respective year's funding provision, EDB will require them to provide justifications and an improvement proposal, with a view to encouraging the schools to make good use of the funding to support NCS students as far as possible. In tandem, EDB will continue to deploy existing monitoring and support measures, including conducting school visits to advise schools and KGs on effective deployment of resources; organising experience sharing sessions among schools; and/or issuing reminders to individual schools with unjustified under-spending for making improvements, if any, etc.

- 4) According to paragraph 2.16(b) of the Audit Report, of the 283 primary, secondary and special schools that first received the NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million in any school year in the period from the 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 school years, 44 (15%) were neither visited by EDB in the school year they first received the Grant nor visited in the following two

school years. By the end of the 2019/2020 school year, 26 (9%) schools, which were special schools, had not yet been visited by EDB. Please advise why all the 26 schools not yet visited were special schools.

- 5) According to paragraphs 2.19 and 2.20 of the Audit Report, EDB has agreed to take measures to arrange supervisory visits to the schools in a more timely manner. Please advise:
- (a) the measures taken by EDB to improve the timeliness of supervisory visits to schools; and
  - (b) whether EDB has visited all the 26 special schools to provide them with professional advice and support on the use of the Grant by now. If not, whether EDB has a timetable to visit these schools.

#### EDB's response

##### 4 and 5(b)

In the first three school years since the introduction of the NCS Grant, priority had been accorded to ordinary schools as most of these schools were first-timers for receiving the Grant at the initial stage of implementation of the support measures for NCS students. In tandem, EDB provided advice through daily liaisons to all schools receiving the NCS Grant (including the 26 special schools). For special schools, the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Adapted Learning Framework (for NCS Students with Intellectual Disabilities)” (Adapted Framework) was under development then and was formally launched for implementation in the 2018/19 school year. Acknowledging that the new Framework needed time to take root in special schools, it was our original plan to conduct supervisory visits to special schools concerned starting from the 2019/20 school year. Despite the social incidents and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the daily operation of schools in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years, EDB has made endeavours to visit the special schools concerned as far as possible. Amongst the aforesaid 26 special schools, three schools were no longer eligible for the NCS Grant and hence school visits to these schools were no longer applicable. So far in the 2020/21 school year, EDB has visited five of them and will arrange visits to another four. For the remaining 14 special schools, EDB plans to complete all the visits by the 2021/22 school year.

##### 5(a)

In view of the Audit Commission's recommendations, EDB has reviewed the work plan on supervisory visits having regard to the manpower resources available. We will accord priority to those schools newly provided with the NCS Grant so as to provide timely advice and support to those schools with regard to their planning of the use of the Grant and the implementation of the support measures, both of which will be under scrutiny. Besides, priority will be accorded to schools requiring additional support or experiencing problems in planning the

support measures. In the interest of resource management, we will also explore how to streamline and adopt multiple ways such as video conferencing instead of on-site visits for those schools which have already accumulated experience in using the NCS Grant with no major operational problems identified.

- 6) According to paragraph 2.23 of the Audit Report, in the 2019/2020 school year, while there were 433 KGs and 52 special schools admitting NCS students, no feedback was collected from major stakeholders of KGs and special schools through questionnaire survey on the support measures for NCS students by schools. Please advise the reasons for not collecting feedback from major stakeholders of KGs and special schools through questionnaire survey.
- 7) According to paragraphs 2.24 and 2.25 of the Audit Report, EDB has agreed to strengthen measures to ensure that feedback from major stakeholders of KGs and special schools is collected. Please advise when EDB will start collecting feedback from major stakeholders of KGs and special schools through questionnaire survey.

#### EDB's response

(6) and (7)

All along, EDB has collected feedback from major stakeholders on the support measures for NCS students through different channels, and learnt about the implementation of relevant measures in schools. EDB does not conduct questionnaire surveys with stakeholders of KGs in the same manner as practised in primary and secondary schools because much of the qualitative feedback from school teaching staff is collected through school plans, school reports and school visits. The school plans contain specific information on how KGs use the NCS grant, the professional training teachers have attended, different modes of learning activities to support NCS students, and ways to strengthen communication with parents of NCS students and promote cultural integration. During the school visits, officers collect feedback through interviews with school personnel and reviews of school documents as well as lesson observations. 87% of the KGs receiving the NCS Grant were visited in the first year of implementation and the remaining KGs were visited in the second year. 49 KGs were visited for the second time in the second year of implementation. While it is not feasible to collect views from KG students through questionnaire survey in view of their tender age, EDB officers would converse with NCS students during school visits to understand their Cantonese communication skills and learning outcomes. As for special schools in receipt of the NCS Grant, the stakeholder survey did not cover them in view of the development of the Adapted Framework as well as the planning and development of different methods assessing how NCS students learn the Chinese language in special schools in early years.



In view of the Audit Commission's recommendations, starting from the 2021/22 school year, the coverage of the stakeholder survey will be expanded to KGs and special schools to collect feedback from major stakeholders in a more comprehensive manner.

### **Part 3: Capacity building for teachers**

- 8) According to paragraph 3.3 of the Audit Report, in the 2019/2020 school year, there were 988 primary, secondary and special schools (with or without NCS students), and 13 794 teachers teaching Chinese Language at these schools. Of the 988 schools, 252 (26%) did not have teachers who had attended EDB's pertinent training during the period from the 2014/2015 to 2019/2020 school years. Of the 252 schools, 157 (62%) had NCS students. Of the 13 794 teachers teaching Chinese Language in the 988 schools, 9 986 (72%) did not attend EDB's training during the period. Please advise whether EDB agrees that setting training requirements for teachers can facilitate EDB in ensuring that teachers continue to develop their professional capacity in teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language.
- 9) According to paragraphs 3.7 and 3.8 of the Audit Report, EDB has agreed to consider the need to set appropriate training requirements for primary, secondary and special school Chinese Language teachers on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language. Please advise the progress and the training requirements to be set by EDB for these teachers.

#### **EDB's response**

(8) and (9)

EDB agrees that teachers have to continually build their capacity to meet students' needs. With regard to the recommendation that EDB should consider the need to set appropriate training requirements for primary, secondary and special schools with NCS students, with a view to facilitating the professional development of Chinese Language teachers on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language, EDB will pay due regard to differences in school-based circumstances and teachers' professional development needs, and deliberate on and explore the need for this requirement via existing engagement and consultation channels.

In analysing the readiness of teachers receiving training on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language, we consider it more reasonable and relevant to focus on those teachers who need to teach NCS students instead of all the 988 schools and 13 794 teachers as suggested in the Audit Report. Furthermore, teachers have all along participated in a wide array of professional development opportunities in different modes. Attending courses offered by EDB is only one of the various modes of teacher professional development. Teachers also join programmes offered by tertiary institutions as well as engage in different kinds of in-house professional development activities and cross-school experience sharing.

In view of the variety of teacher professional development activities, different types of teachers' professional development should also be counted to reflect how teachers learn instead of the confining to the courses offered by EDB when calculating teachers' training hours. EDB would continually organise different modes of professional development programmes for Chinese Language teachers to join in accordance with school-based circumstances and teachers' professional development needs.

In gist, EDB is following up the recommendation. We have commenced engaging Chinese Language teachers and language experts in deliberation, and will further engage school head representatives to consider such a recommendation from the perspective of school management.

10) According to paragraph 3.10 of the Audit Report, there has been only 99 applications received for the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) ("PEG Scheme") since its launch in the 2014/2015 school year. As at end of October 2020, 89 of the 99 teachers were approved under the PEG Scheme to undertake structured part-time training programmes, representing only 20% of the maximum number of 450 teachers that the PEG Scheme aimed to support. According to paragraph 3.11 of the Audit Report, EDB has informed the Audit Commission ("Audit") of the reasons for the lukewarm response to the PEG Scheme. Please advise:

- (a) why EDB was unable to foresee these factors before the PEG Scheme was launched; and
- (b) the measures taken/to be taken by EDB to address the identified factors in order to improve participation in the PEG Scheme.

#### EDB's response

- (a) EDB had abolished the so-called "designated school" system since the 2013/14 school year, and the number of local mainstream schools admitting NCS students began to surge. To address an apparent need for enhancing teachers' professional capability of teaching Chinese as a second language in these schools, the PEG Scheme was thus devised and launched on a pilot basis in the 2014/15 school year. In the absence of any precedent, the training quota of 450 in the PEG was proposed based on our best estimate that up to around 3% of the total number of Chinese Language teachers in all publicly-funded schools in the 2012/13 school year would join the scheme. The number was intended as a quota rather than a target for the purpose of earmarking funding for the PEG.

In addition, EDB held focus group meetings in 2013 to collect the views of some stakeholders, including school heads and teachers. The attendees

indicated their support and interest in the PEG Scheme. EDB also consulted the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR), of which membership covered representatives from different levels of schools. There was a general consensus among the stakeholders that award-bearing postgraduate programmes (either diploma or master's degree) covering a broad range of curriculum, instructional and assessment designs on teaching Chinese as a second language should be provided under the PEG Scheme.

- (b) EDB has attempted to encourage participation in the PEG Scheme through various promotion channels, including issuing circular memorandums and letters to schools, leveraging online channels to reach out to the teaching community through the social media page of the Committee on Professional Development of Teachers and Principals and SCOLAR website.

In addition, EDB, upon SCOLAR's endorsement, raised the maximum subsidy to be provided under the PEG Scheme in 2016 (from \$30,000 to \$34,000) and 2018 (\$34,000 to \$64,000) respectively. In addition, the PEG Scheme provides an additional subsidy (i.e. an extra 30% of the tuition fee of the study programme, up to an additional maximum of \$30,000) to applicants of the PEG Scheme who continue to teach NCS students Chinese in schools offering the formal local curriculum for a total of three years within five years upon graduation.

Furthermore, EDB made some fine-tuning in the framework of the recognised programmes in 2017 and 2020, such as increasing the proportion of online learning elements to 25% to allow teachers more flexibility in scheduling their studies. The recognised programme providers and other tertiary education institutions were well informed of the refinements.

- 11) According to paragraphs 3.13 and 3.14 of the Audit Report, EDB has agreed to review the way forward for the PEG Scheme. Please advise the timetable, progress, and results (if any) of the review.

#### EDB's response

Currently, EDB is conducting an overall review of the PEG Scheme and collecting views from stakeholders including participating teachers as well as their school management. The relevant review results and the proposed way forward are planned for report to SCOLAR before the end of 2021.

- 12) According to paragraph 3.17 of the Audit Report, in each school year in the period from the 2014/2015 to 2019/2020 school years, there were 106 to 142 schools that received school-based support services ("SBSS"), representing only 10% to 14% of the total number of schools with NCS students. Of the 723 schools with NCS students every year throughout the period, 438 (61%)

did not receive any SBSS. Among the 438 schools, many had NCS students accounting for more than 10% of the total number of students in the schools. Please advise:

- (a) whether any schools had been identified by EDB as in need of SBSS but were reluctant to apply for the services. If affirmative, whether EDB had followed up with these schools their reasons for not applying for SBSS and the efforts made to help EDB on these schools to address their needs; and
- (b) the reasons for unable to boost the schools' interest in applying for SBSS.

#### EDB's response

- (a) SBSS is one of the many additional support measures available to schools. Participation is entirely voluntary. Schools may choose to participate in certain years but not others, taking into account their changing needs and circumstances. It is not the intention, nor is it advisable, to associate schools participating in SBSS with low-performing schools "requiring intensive support". That said, EDB has established an internal platform for identifying and addressing diverse school needs, with officers from Regional Education Offices (REOs) to follow up with the schools' applications closely. Priority will be accorded to these schools if they submit applications for SBSS. Nearly all of these schools identified by EDB had applied for and were allocated relevant SBSS.
  - (b) EDB provides multifarious types of support to schools with NCS students (including funding, teacher training, student support, etc.), with a view to addressing their different needs appropriately. Each type of support has its own merits and opportunity costs. EDB has to stress that SBSS, as one of the support measures, is a very intensive type of professional development in terms of the investment of time and effort by teachers and EDB. It is not the policy intent for SBSS to cover all schools in Hong Kong. The number of participating schools should not be used as the success criterion of SBSS or as an indication of the popularity of SBSS among schools without considering the intricate factors behind the schools' choice and the SBSS provided. Given the broad range of new curriculum development goals which schools need to address in recent years and that the proportions of NCS students vary a lot across schools, schools have different support needs and would prioritise their support needs across the years. Therefore, it is not realistic to expect a high percentage of schools to request support relating to NCS students every year.
- 13) According to paragraphs 3.23(a) and 3.24 of the Audit Report, EDB has agreed to step up efforts in assisting schools in their review on the needs for capacity building for their teachers and encouraging schools to make good

use of SBSS where necessary. Please advise the actions taken by EDB, the responses from schools and the effectiveness of the actions in addressing the issue.

#### EDB's response

Under the principles of school-based management, schools need to review their situations and analyse schools' and teachers' development needs. These needs will then be prioritised and appropriate teacher professional development plans will be devised accordingly, which may include the application for SBSS to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching. EDB officers, including those in the REOs and Quality Assurance Sections, will give concrete and professional advice to schools, with a view to strengthening their self-reflection culture and leading sustainable development under the spirit of the School Development and Accountability framework. Those that are identified with a support need in respect of different curriculum areas will be strongly encouraged to apply for SBSS. EDB will continue to strengthen schools' effectiveness through various means.

EDB and the tertiary institutions will conduct more territory-wide dissemination sessions and strengthen the professional learning community activities for schools to share their good practices and achievements under SBSS. This will encourage more schools in need of support to submit their applications for relevant support services.

14) According to paragraph 3.20 of the Audit Report, Audit analysed the school visits conducted by EDB on the six University-School Support Programme projects completed in the period from the 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 school years and found that the percentage of schools visited by EDB and the frequency of visits per school varied significantly. Please advise whether EDB had monitored these visits to ensure that the frequency and the coverage were proper and well justified. If affirmative, the details; if not, why not.

#### EDB's response

EDB puts due emphasis on evaluating the quality of the services provided from a professional perspective, and setting straightjacket quantitative performance indicators for schools of varying needs is not considered the most crucial success criterion. Given the large number of participating schools supported by the service providers, EDB officers monitored the effectiveness of the services through professional exchanges with service providers via emails and phone calls. Regular on-site visits were paid to observe each type of support rendered by service providers, such as collaborative lesson planning meetings, lesson observations, and workshops, rather than giving direct support/visit to each and every school. In case of schools with specific concerns, EDB officers exercised their professional judgement and paid more visits to them with the service providers.

In this regard, internal suggestions have been provided to EDB officers for monitoring the services, including the frequency of school visits, as well as the nature and foci of the activities being observed. Such requirements have also been reiterated at regular meetings.

The quality and effectiveness of the services have also been evaluated annually through questionnaire surveys, focus interviews and gathering qualitative and quantitative information during on-site visits and lesson observations by EDB professional officers. The results of the surveys and focus interviews, as well as the observations of EDB officers during monitoring visits, have been well documented.

In gist, the success of SBSS hinges on a number of factors, including quality of services rather than frequency of school visits. There cannot be a simple quantitative parameter to safeguard professional support services of qualitative nature in education. Nonetheless, EDB would continue reviewing and enhancing the existing measures for monitoring the services whenever necessary so as to enhance their quality.

15) According to paragraphs 3.23(b) and 3.24 of the Audit Report, EDB has agreed to issue clear guidelines on the on-site evaluation of projects commissioned to tertiary institutions under SBSS. Please advise the timetable and progress.

#### EDB's response

As mentioned before, internal suggestions have been provided to support officers for monitoring the services, including the frequency of school visits, as well as the nature and foci of the activities being observed. These suggestions are now being spelt out clearly. The guidelines will include service specifications for the service providers, frequency of EDB officers' monitoring visits, coverage and sampling method for schools being visited and other monitoring measures that are in place. A balance will be struck between the operational needs and manpower available in EDB for monitoring visits without sacrificing the quality of the SBSS. The guidelines are expected to be ready before the commencement of the 2021/22 school year.

#### **Part 4: Other support measures**

16) According to paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4(a) of the Audit Report, in the period from the 2015/2016 to 2019/2020 school years, the number of schools nominating NCS students to enrol in the Student Support Programme (SSP) decreased by 48 (38%) from 128 to 80 and the number of NCS students nominated decreased by 217 (22%) from 974 to 757. According to EDB, the decrease might be attributable to the fact that starting from the 2014/2015 school year, EDB had put in place a series of enhanced support measures for NCS students.

Schools admitting NCS students had been provided with more resources for developing school-based programmes to suit the learning needs of their NCS students. Please advise whether the above situation implied that the resources provided to NCS students were more than enough or the Programme was lack of attractiveness.

#### EDB's response

Upon the implementation of the series of enhanced support measures for NCS students since the 2014/15 school year, schools have had more choices for arranging education support services for NCS students. In comparison, these school-based programmes address the particular needs of individual schools better than the SSP. Besides, given that the SSP is supplementary in nature, schools might prefer having their school-based programmes that are more tailored for their own students. EDB will review the complementarity of the SSP with other activities and programmes in the long run. Meanwhile, EDB will take various measures to promote the SSP to NCS students and schools.

17) According to paragraphs 4.5, 4.6(b) and 4.7 of the Audit Report, in the period from the 2016/2017 to 2018/2019 school years, of the 2195 NCS students enrolled in the SSP, 437 (20%) dropped out of the Programme. In each school year during the period, 15 to 21 study groups (i.e. 32% to 45% of the total number of study groups) had average attendance rates of not more than 60%. EDB advised that since the 2014/2015 school year, schools had been providing more after-school activities and school-based support to NCS students and there might be time clash with other student programmes and activities. Please advise:

- (a) whether the above situation implied that the support measures for NCS students were more than they needed; and
- (b) the measures taken by EDB to encourage and facilitate students to attend lessons under the Programme and improve the drop-out rate and the attendance rate, as well as the effectiveness of the measures in improving the drop-out rate and the attendance rate.

#### EDB's response

- (a) The SSP, as a supplementary learning programme, is one of the choices available for NCS students. It is understandable that at times there may be time clashes. That said, students will still benefit by joining part, if not all, of the SSP. EDB will review the complementarity of the SSP with other activities and programmes in the long run.
- (b) Before the commencement of the SSP, EDB offers assistance to the service provider in arranging venues in convenient locations easily accessible to

participating students, with a view to minimising their commuting time. During the course of the SSP, the service provider is requested to communicate regularly with participating schools and parents on students' learning progress, including their attendance situation. In case of frequent absentees, EDB requests the service provider and participating schools concerned to render appropriate assistance, e.g. changing class or venue for the students in need. There are various factors affecting students' attendance, including casual leaves, having time clashes with other activities/programmes, parental involvement and recognition of its importance, etc. EDB will continue to monitor the situation and offer suitable assistance.

- 18) According to paragraphs 4.8 and 4.9 of the Audit Report, NCS students enrolled in the SSP are divided into study groups according to school levels. However, the results of the questionnaires completed by NCS students in the period from the 2015/2016 to 2019/2020 school years revealed that in each school year, around 51% to 57% of the students found that the study materials used in their study groups were not at the appropriate level of difficulty for them. Please advise:
- (a) whether EDB agrees that this was one of the reasons for the high drop-out rate and the low attendance rate;
  - (b) whether EDB had taken any remedial actions to address the problem revealed by the questionnaires. If affirmative, the details and why the problems were not improved; if not, the reasons; and
  - (c) the measures taken/to be taken by EDB to ensure that students are arranged into study groups of appropriate levels to cater for their individual learning needs.

#### EDB's response

- (a) and (b)

To enhance the learning effectiveness, EDB has reminded the service provider to cater for NCS students' learner diversity. To better address their diversified learning needs, course instructors have devised learning activities and related teaching materials of different levels of difficulty. The service provider also provides training for the course instructors and teaching assistants to enhance their mastery of pedagogical skills. However, views collected from the questionnaires reveal that the above measures have room for enhancement. The students' unstable attendance would have also impacted on their learning effectiveness. We will explore further measures to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.



- (c) According to the prevailing practice, students from the same grade level are allocated into the same learning group and their Chinese language proficiency is assessed at the commencement of the classes. To better address students' learner diversity, EDB and the service provider will consider the feasibility of conducting an assessment of students' Chinese language proficiency before the commencement of the classes so as to arrange the students into different learning groups according to their Chinese language proficiency, instead of their grade levels, to enhance learning effectiveness.
- 19) According to paragraph 4.12 of the Audit Report, of the lesson observations in the 42 study groups conducted by EDB in the period from the 2017/2018 to 2018/2019 schools, course instructors' performance was rated "1" and "2" in two (5%) and 18 (43%) study groups respectively and students' performance was rated "1" and "2" in three (7%) and 14 (33%) study groups respectively. Please advise:
- (a) whether EDB had taken any follow-up actions on the study groups with course instructors' performance or students' performance that were rated "1" (i.e. "poor") or "2" (i.e. "satisfactory"). If affirmative, the details and the effectiveness of the follow-up actions; if not, why not; and
- (b) the measures taken/to be taken by EDB to improve the course instructors' performance and students' performance.

#### EDB's response

- (a) EDB conducts regular lesson observations, with a view to having a better understanding of course instructors' teaching performance. After the lesson observations, verbal feedback and recommendations are provided on the spot for enhancing the performance of instructors. Besides, EDB maintains close liaisons with the service provider to reflect the observations and give advice for improvement. Specifically, EDB has advised the service provider to refine the learning and teaching materials into appropriate levels of difficulty to better match the Chinese proficiency of the NCS students, to advise the course instructors on effective pedagogies to meet the diverse learning needs of the students, and to provide more training to their course instructors, etc.
- (b) EDB will arrange more lesson observations to monitor more closely the teaching performance of the course instructors, and offer advice and appropriate assistance to enhance their teaching quality. Besides, in the 2-year contract for the 2020/21 to 2021/22 school years, one of the course instructors' requirements of "having at least one year of experience in teaching Chinese to NCS students or conducting related teaching research" has been revised to "having at least one year of experience in teaching Chinese to NCS students or conducting related teaching research in Hong

Kong” to ensure the relevancy of the experience in the local context to better meet the learning needs of the NCS students in Hong Kong.

- 20) According to paragraph 4.18 of the Audit Report, although the number of NCS students eligible to participate in the Summer Bridging Programme increased by 1 226 (22%) from 5 602 in 2013 to 6 828 in 2019, the number of NCS students participating in the Programme decreased by 590 (34%) from 1 730 in 2013 to 1 140 in 2019. The participation rate was low and decreased continuously from 31% in 2013 to 17% in 2019. According to EDB, there were competition and time clash with other student programmes and activities conducted in the summer, hence students might have difficulties in attending the lessons. Please advise:
- (a) whether EDB had taken any measures to tackle the problem. If affirmative, the details of the measures, why the situation was not improved and how EDB will fine-tune the measures; and
  - (b) the measures taken by EDB to step up efforts in encouraging schools to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Summer Bridging Programme and the effectiveness of the measures.

#### EDB’s response

- (a) The participating schools have been advised by the EDB to avoid arranging the programme in the peak periods when NCS students usually return to their home countries. However, during the summer holidays, some students have other engagements and might not accord top priority to the programme. EDB will enhance the quality and attractiveness of the programme by developing more attractive teaching contents and activities, and rendering professional advice to improve the administrative arrangements of the programme.
  - (b) EDB issues a circular memorandum in April/May every year to invite schools to join the Summer Bridging Programme. EDB will contact schools having joined the programme in the previous years in advance to encourage them to join again. EDB will also promote the programme by producing more information leaflets and placing more advertisements in different media channels including radio, newspapers, websites and other publications for people of different races.
- 21) According to paragraph 4.26 of the Audit Report, every year for the period from the 2018/2019 to 2020/2021 school years, invitations of quotation were sent to the same five service providers for life planning education services but the responses were lukewarm. Four (80%) of the five service providers did not respond in the 2018/2019 and 2020/2021 school years and three (60%) did not respond in the 2019/2020 school year. Please advise:

- (a) how these service providers were chosen;
- (b) why EDB continued to invite the service providers who repeatedly did not respond to previous invitations but not attempting to invite other service providers;
- (c) the reasons for the lukewarm response from the service providers; and
- (d) whether there are other suitable service providers who may be interested in providing the services.

EDB's response

- (a) There are only a limited number of service providers providing life planning education services for NCS students. EDB has not compiled a list of suppliers. The five service providers were selected based on EDB's best knowledge and understanding of the sector.
  - (b) Life planning education services for NCS students is relatively new in the sector. There are only a limited number of potential service providers that have experience or interest in providing such services to secondary schools.
  - (c) EDB has learnt that service providers did not submit any bids mainly because: (i) they had insufficient manpower to run a new programme; (ii) they had no interest in starting a new programme; and (iii) they had concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - (d) EDB will continue to approach schools and the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters to identify other potential service providers and expand the invitation list as far as possible. For the provision of services for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years, we have invited tenders through open tendering procedures.
- 22) According to paragraph 4.27 of the Audit Report, the demand from schools for on-site support services on life planning education was high. Many schools and NCS students did not succeed in the applications for the services due to the limited capacity of the service provider. Please advise:
- (a) whether EDB had assessed the demand for the services before launching the services. If affirmative, whether the actual demand exceeded what EDB had estimated; if not, why not;
  - (b) whether EDB agrees that it is highly undesirable for a high percentage of NCS students to be denied the opportunity to receive the services that they needed; and

- (c) the measures taken by EDB to increase the capacity in the provision of the services and the effectiveness of the measures in increasing the capacity.

#### EDB's response

- (a) EDB's objective is to strengthen teachers' knowledge and capacity for organising life planning education activities for NCS students through the one-year school-based on-site support services. After completion of the services, trained schools can develop their own school-based life planning education activities. To maximise the impact, priority to participate in the one-year services has been given to schools with high intake of NCS students and the services are provided by batches (16 schools per school year). All such schools will have participated in the programme eventually. The number of applications varied in the past three years. Each year, the service provider organises a manageable number of on-site services to ensure their quality. Apart from the school-based on-site support services, the service provider also organises one-off career exploration activities in each school year. According to the records, the provision of such activities can meet the demand.
  - (b) As explained in (a) above, the aim of on-site support services is to "train the trainers" and schools are prioritised with reference to their number of NCS students. Eventually, all schools with high intake of NCS students will have participated in the programme. Schools not yet selected can apply for the career exploration activities.
  - (c) EDB will explore the feasibility of increasing the number of participating schools for the 2021/22 to 2022/23 school years. EDB will continue to evaluate the effectiveness through collecting views from teachers and students, conducting evaluation meetings with the service provider, etc.
- 23) According to paragraph 4.36 of the Audit Report, in the first stage (i.e. the Discretionary Places (DP) stage) of the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) System, each student may apply to not more than two secondary schools. EDB requires secondary schools to make public prior to admission the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion. Of the 52 secondary schools whose websites were examined by Audit in January 2021, 15 (29%) had made public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion only in Chinese but not in English and four (8%), while making public the information in both Chinese and English, had the icon directing to the English webpage shown in Chinese only. Please advise:
- (a) the assistance provided by EDB to NCS students and their parents to help them apply to secondary schools which disclose the admission criteria

and weighting of each criterion for the DP stage of the SSPA System only in Chinese; and

- (b) the measures in place to encourage secondary schools to make public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion for the DP stage of the SSPA System in both Chinese and English, in order to help parents of NCS students understand such information to facilitate school choices and the effectiveness of the measures.

#### EDB's response

- (a) The prevailing SSPA System provides all eligible students, irrespective of their races or places of birth, with equal opportunities for admission to public sector secondary schools. For the DP stage of the SSPA System, EDB has all along required schools to make public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion in advance and to ensure the consistency and completeness of the information published. In addition to uploading their admission criteria and weighting of each criterion to schools' webpages, participating secondary schools may also publish such information in the Secondary School Profiles, the bilingual versions of which, are available in both the printed and electronic versions. Based on the Secondary School Profiles 2020/2021, over 90% of the participating secondary schools have made available their admission criteria and weighting of each criterion for the assessment in the DP stage in the English version of the Secondary School Profiles.

Furthermore, EDB provides hotline service for answering parents' enquiries on SSPA matters, including enquiries related to the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion of individual secondary schools, and for providing appropriate assistance to parents in need. Specifically, to facilitate NCS students and their parents in understanding the SSPA System and obtaining the relevant information, with a view to making informed school choices, EDB has been organising dedicated briefing sessions in English with simultaneous interpretation services in major languages for people of different races before the commencement of the DP stage in each SSPA cycle.

- (b) In view of Audit Commission's recommendations, EDB will appeal to participating secondary schools, through various channels such as the SSPA Committee and the Notes for Secondary Schools on Handling Applications for Secondary One Discretionary Places appended to EDB's circular letter, to announce their admission criteria and weighting of each criterion in both Chinese and English on their webpages in addition to publicising the aforesaid information in the Secondary School Profiles. In tandem, EDB will conduct regular checking of schools' webpages, and follow up with schools as appropriate.

24) According to paragraph 4.43(a) of the Audit Report, EDB had been collecting information to monitor the implementation of the support measures for NCS students and making refinements in an on-going manner. Please advise the progress and whether EDB had conducted any comprehensive reviews on the overall effectiveness of all enhanced measures implemented since the 2014/2015 school year in supporting NCS students' learning of the Chinese language. If affirmative, the results of the reviews; if not, whether EDB has any plan to conduct the review.

#### EDB's response

Regarding KG education for NCS students, the KG education scheme has been implemented starting from the 2017/18 school year. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, a 5-tiered grant is provided for Scheme-KGs according to the number of NCS students admitted. Scheme-KGs are required to strengthen support for their NCS students, including supporting them in learning Chinese, fostering a diversified culture and building an inclusive environment. With EDB's enhancement of the provision of grant and professional development for teachers, and advice given to the KGs on the school plans and during the school visits, KGs develop and improve the school-based support measures and make appropriate use of the additional grant to help NCS students learn Chinese effectively. The on-going review has provided useful information in monitoring the implementation of the support measures. Experience gained in the first two years' implementation has thrown light on the needs of refinement and enhancement through provision of a 5-tiered grant which has been implemented since the 2019/20 school year. We will continue to keep in view the progress and monitor the implementation.

As regards primary and secondary education, the educational measure for NCS students to learn the Chinese language using Cantonese is unique to Hong Kong. The measure will be refined on a need basis while it takes time for such a measure to take root. Besides, we need to understand that the learning effectiveness of NCS students is also affected by other factors (such as parents' expectation and cooperation, and students' learning attitude). It is therefore neither possible nor appropriate to assess the effectiveness of the measures solely based on the improvement of the Chinese proficiency of NCS students.

As a matter of fact, with the implementation of the series of enhanced support measures for NCS students starting from the 2014/15 school year, the number of schools admitting NCS students has increased from about 590 in the 2013/14 school year to about 650 in the 2020/21 school year, which covers about 70% of the schools in the territory. In view of the above, the Government's policy intent of encouraging and supporting the integration of NCS students into the community, including facilitating their early adaptation to the local education

system is being attained progressively. EDB will continue collecting and taking into consideration the views from stakeholders, so as to refine the support measures as necessary.

Education Bureau  
27 May 2021

**Consideration of Chapter 2 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 76  
Education support measures for non-Chinese speaking students  
Questions and information request**

**Response from the Education Bureau (EDB)**

**Part 2: Funding support to schools**

- 1) According to paragraph 2.7 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 76 ("Audit Report"), EDB reviewed the school plans and the school reports submitted by schools to assess their planned and actual uses of Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) Grant, with a view to providing professional advice and support to schools, etc. Please advise whether any problems were identified in the reviews conducted by EDB in the past. If affirmative, please advise the support provided by EDB to schools, and whether abuse of the funding by schools was identified and EDB's follow-up action.

EDB's response

Based on the school plans and reports collected, schools' deployment of the NCS Grant is in general considered proper and within the ambit. For instance, those schools receiving the NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million largely adopted a holistic approach in resource planning and deployment of staff by flexibly combining various resources available to schools to support their NCS students' learning of Chinese and the creation of an inclusive environment in schools. As for schools admitting a relatively small number of NCS students, they suitably deployed the additional funding of \$50,000 to offer after-school Chinese language support programmes to their NCS students.

Since the provision of the NCS Grant, only two irregular cases involving weak school administration and/or misunderstanding of the ambit of the funding were identified. For such cases, EDB took follow-up actions immediately to further explain to schools the proper ambit of the additional funding and require them to make rectifications.

- 2) According to paragraph 2.8 of the Audit Report, quite a number of schools receiving the NCS Grant for strengthening the support to NCS students did not submit their school plans or school reports in a timely manner. Would EDB please advise:



- (a) Whether EDB was aware of the situation before the Audit Commission conducted the audit inspection; and
- (b) Whether EDB had tried to find out the difficulties of the schools concerned and whether relevant support was provided to them (such as providing templates of school plans /reports for their reference)?

#### EDB's response

- (a) EDB adopts an ongoing approach to engage kindergartens (KGs) and schools receiving the NCS Grant in professional dialogues regarding the support measures rendered to NCS students, and keeps track of the progress of schools' submission of school plans and school reports. We were aware of the situation that some schools were late in their submission of school plans and reports, and had issued written and/or verbal reminders to the schools concerned.
- (b) Through ongoing engagement and professional dialogues, EDB had gathered views from KGs/schools on the reasons for and difficulties encountered by schools with belated submissions of school plans and school reports. The key observations were set out in our response to Question 1 in Appendix 1.

Apart from sending reminders and highlighting the importance of timely submission, EDB has also taken steps to facilitate compliance. For instance, templates of school plan and school report are provided to KGs and schools to facilitate their preparation of the documents. Besides, we have enhanced an e-platform facilitating primary, secondary and special schools to complete the school plans and school reports in a more systematic and smooth manner. We also share good practices of support measures amongst schools and KGs through our regular contacts with them, supervisory school visits and sharing sessions, etc.

- 3) According to paragraph 2.11 of the Audit Report, a number of schools had not fully utilised the Grant. Had EDB ascertained whether these schools had encountered difficulties and provided support to these schools, including sharing with them the success stories and experiences of other schools?

#### EDB's response

As mentioned in Appendix 1, the NCS Grant provides additional resources to schools to supplement the rich array of resources already available to them. Our focus is to ensure that schools establish effective financial management processes to deploy their resources in a prudent, cost-effective and timely manner, and that

the expenditures incurred are reasonable and necessary for education purposes. While admittedly the NCS Grant is intended to provide a sufficient amount of additional funding for schools' flexible deployment, some schools may not use up the NCS Grant every year for the sake of deploying the resources in a more strategic manner, (i.e. funding is cautiously kept for accommodating more longer term support plans across different school years) or using integrated and holistic approach alongside other school-based initiatives. In some other cases, schools had faced difficulties in service procurement (related learning and teaching materials) and recruiting suitable part-time tutors for the after-school programmes and/or additional teaching staff. Apart from providing schools with guidelines on the use of the funding through circulars, we provide schools with advice based on their school-based circumstances and needs during our routine visits and liaisons such as citing examples of effective funding deployment, increasing the frequency of after-school Chinese language support sessions and appointing part-time additional teaching staff to tailor suitable learning and teaching materials to better cater for learner diversity, etc. Besides, we also organise experience sharing sessions to facilitate professional exchanges among schools on good practices of support measures so that they can deploy the additional funding more effectively to support NCS students. For primary, secondary and special schools with a surplus situation reaching 70% or above of the respective year's funding provision, we will request them to provide justifications and an improvement proposal. For details, please refer to our response to Question 3 in [Appendix 1](#).

- 4) According to paragraph 2.17(a) of the Audit Report, on balancing the need to visit schools in a timely manner and the constraint of manpower capacity, EDB planned to visit all the ordinary schools receiving the NCS Grant once in the first three years upon the launch of the Grant and relevant support measures in the 2014/15 school year. Has EDB considered that merely visiting the ordinary schools receiving the Grant once might not be enough for explaining to schools the policy on the NCS Grant and relevant support measures and providing them with adequate support? If affirmative, has EDB considered increasing the number of visits? If not, what are the reasons?
- 5) According to paragraph 2.17(b) of the Audit Report, all of the 26 schools to which EDB did not pay supervisory visits were special schools. Please advise the priorities or selection criteria of EDB for supervisory visits. Considering that NCS students in special schools should have greater needs for additional support, please explain why they were being neglected by EDB? Is this because EDB is more inclined to take the easy way out?

## EDB's response

(4) and (5)

Apart from supervisory school visits, EDB has been providing support to all schools receiving the NCS Grant through regular liaisons and examination of school plans and reports.

As mentioned in our response to Q4 and Q5 in Appendix 1, in the first three school years since the introduction of the NCS Grant, priority had been accorded to ordinary schools as most of these schools were first-timers for receiving the Grant at the initial stage of implementation of the support measures for NCS students. In tandem, EDB provided advice through daily liaisons to all schools receiving the NCS Grant (including the 26 special schools). For special schools, the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Adapted Learning Framework (for NCS Students with Intellectual Disabilities)” (Adapted Framework) was under development then and was formally launched for implementation in the 2018/19 school year. Acknowledging that the new Framework needed time to take root in special schools, it was our original plan to conduct supervisory visits to special schools concerned starting from the 2019/20 school year. Whilst the daily operation of schools greatly affected by the social incidents as well as the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years, EDB has been arranging visits to the special schools and plans to complete all the visits by the 2021/22 school year. For details, please refer to our response to Questions 4 and 5 in Appendix 1.

In view of the recommendations of the Audit Commission, EDB has reviewed the work plan on supervisory visits having regard to the manpower resources available. We will accord priority to schools newly provided with the NCS Grant the soonest possible. Besides, EDB will also identify schools requiring additional support or experiencing problems in planning for the support measures and accord priority to pay supervisory visits to such schools. In the interest of resource management, we will also explore how to streamline and adopt multiple ways such as video conferencing for those schools which have already accumulated experience in using the NCS Grant with no major operational problems identified.

6) According to paragraph 2.21 of the Audit Report, EDB collected on a yearly basis, through questionnaires, feedback from major stakeholders of the primary and secondary schools receiving the NCS Grant ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million to review the implementation of support measures for NCS students by schools. Will EDB please provide the following information:

(a) What is the average response rate of schools?

- (b) Has EDB set any targets for the response rate of schools? If affirmative, what are the targets? If not, what are the reasons for not setting targets?
- (c) After collecting the feedback, what measures would be taken by EDB to follow up the feedback and improve the situation of implementing the support measures for NCS students?

#### EDB's response

(a) and (b)

For the stakeholder survey amongst schools receiving the NCS Grant ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million, schools are asked to return a designated number of completed questionnaires from each type of stakeholders (viz., school heads, NCS student coordinators, Chinese Language teachers, NCS students and their parents) to EDB. Other than the school head and NCS student coordinator, the designated number of questionnaires for Chinese Language teachers, NCS students and their parents for each school is set based on the number of NCS students admitted by the school. Over the years, all schools could meet the required number of questionnaire returns, with some schools returned more returns from NCS students and their parents than required. Taking all stakeholders in such schools into account, all school heads and NCS student coordinators, about 25% of all Chinese Language teachers teaching NCS students, some 5% of NCS students and 5% of parents of NCS students completed the questionnaires. For the schools with collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing support services to their NCS students, we invited them to request their respective collaborating NGOs to complete the stakeholder survey. Overall, the response rate was about 40% to 50% over the years.

- (c) We analyse the findings of the stakeholder surveys to identify their needs and concerns, and take follow-up actions to introduce appropriate measures. For example, based on the Chinese Language teachers' views as collected from the stakeholder surveys of the 2015/16 and 2016/17 school years, EDB took actions to develop Chinese Language learning and teaching materials for reference of the school sector. Besides, based on the views from school heads in the stakeholder survey of the 2018/19 school year, we introduced the annual funding adjustment mechanism starting from the 2020/21 school year. In addition, based on school heads' views collected from the stakeholder survey of the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school years, we have devised feasible and suitable strategies in enhancing the transparency of school's deployment of the NCS Grant to provide relevant support measures. As a result, a column about education support for NCS students has been added in the School Profiles since the 2018/19 school year, and schools

receiving the NCS Grant are required to provide a summary of support measures on their school webpages starting from the 2021/22 school year.

### **Part 3: Capacity building for teachers**

- 7) According to paragraph 3.3 of the Audit Report, the Audit Commission analysed the hours of training provided by EDB to Chinese Language teachers of primary, secondary and special schools in the territory in the period from the 2014/15 to 2019/20 school years on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language. The Audit Commission found that teachers' attendance was relatively low and the number of training hours attended by many of them was on the low side. Would EDB please explain the reason(s) and the measures taken to encourage more schools and teachers to participate in the training?

#### **EDB's response**

As mentioned in our response to Question 8 and Question 9 in Appendix 1, in analysing the readiness of teachers to receive training on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language, we consider it more reasonable and relevant to focus on those teachers who need to teach NCS students instead of all the 988 schools and 13 794 teachers as suggested in the Audit Report. Furthermore, Chinese Language teachers have access to a wide array of teaching opportunities not only confined to courses offered by EDB. The analysis may not have fully reflected the situation of professional development of Chinese Language teachers teaching NCS students. Nevertheless, EDB is following up the recommendation on enhancing the professional development of teachers involved in teaching Chinese as a second language. We have commenced engaging Chinese Language teachers and language experts in deliberation, and will further engage school head representatives to consider how best to formulate further measures from the perspective of school management.

- 8) According to paragraph 3.11 of the Audit Report, EDB set out the reasons for the lukewarm response to the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language), including the heavy commitment in terms of the time required to complete the study programmes (two to three years) as well as the tuition fee. Would EDB please advise:
- (a) the number of recognised programmes currently available, the tuition fee, the period of study and other information;

- (b) whether EDB has conferred with tertiary education institutions which provide recognised programmes about the provision of programmes with a shorter study period or via online mode; and
- (c) whether EDB has considered providing schools /teachers with incentives, for example, granting additional subsidy to teachers and their schools upon completion of recognised programmes.

EDB's response

- (a) The Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) (“PEG Scheme”) is a pilot programme for which the number of recognised programmes has varied over the years. The current recognised programmes are set out in the table below.

	Recognised programme under the PEG Scheme (Note 1)	Approximate tuition fee (Note 2)	Period of study
1	Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (With a Specialism in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in Hong Kong Schools)(Part-time) by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University	\$75,600	2 to 3 years
2	Master of Arts in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (With a Specialism in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language in Hong Kong Schools)(Part-time) by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University	\$108,000	2 to 3 years
3	Master of Arts in Chinese Language and Literature (With a Specialism in Chinese Language Teaching for Teachers of Non-Chinese Speaking Students)(Part-time) by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University	\$108,000	2 to 3 years

Notes:

1. All tertiary education institutions are invited to submit programme proposals. All proposals are vetted and determined by a Vetting Committee

comprising about 15 members including school heads, frontline teachers, representatives from tertiary education institutions, and officers from the Curriculum Development Institute of EDB.

2. Tuition fees are charged on a credit unit basis and may vary for individual programmes.
  - (b) All the recognised programmes under the pilot PEG Scheme are postgraduate diploma or master's degree programmes, which inevitably take two to three years for completion by nature. That said, in order to facilitate teachers' participation in the PEG Scheme amid their busy schedules, some fine-tuning in the framework of the recognised programmes was made in 2017 and 2020. In particular, the proportion of online learning elements was increased to 25% to allow teachers more flexibility in scheduling their studies. The recognised programme providers and other tertiary education institutions were well informed of the refinements. Please also refer to our response to Question 10 in [Appendix 1](#).
  - (c) With an aim to enhance teachers' incentive to apply for the PEG Scheme, EDB reviewed and raised the maximum subsidy to be provided under the PEG Scheme in 2016 (from \$30,000 to \$34,000) and 2018 (\$34,000 to \$64,000) respectively upon the endorsement from the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research. In addition, the PEG Scheme provides an additional subsidy (i.e. an extra 30% of the tuition fee of the study programme, up to an additional maximum of \$30,000) to applicants of the PEG Scheme who continue to teach NCS students Chinese in schools offering the formal local curriculum for a total of three years within five years upon graduation.
- 9) According to paragraph 3.17 of the Audit Report, schools with NCS students were not very keen to apply for school-based support services (SBSS) in helping teachers cater for the needs of NCS students in learning Chinese. Does EDB consider this situation undesirable, and uncondusive to enhancing the effectiveness of NCS students in learning Chinese?

#### EDB's response

Given the broad range of new curriculum development goals/needs of schools and that the NCS student concentration varies a lot across schools, schools have different support needs and would prioritise them accordingly across years. Hence, schools apply for SBSS based on their specific development needs and circumstances.

For the period from 2014/15 to 2019/20 school years, the average percentage of schools that applied for and were allocated SBSS was above 95%. This reflected that SBSS had been provided to the vast majority of schools in need. Evaluation results showed that teachers' competence in conducting holistic planning of the school-based Chinese Language curriculum with reference to the Learning Framework to help students learn Chinese progressively has been enhanced. NCS students have shown greater interest and confidence in learning Chinese, and become more active in communicating with their Chinese-speaking counterparts, thereby facilitating inclusion. For details, please refer to the written response to Question 12(b) in Appendix 1.

10) According to paragraph 3.22 of the Audit Report, EDB commissioned four projects to tertiary institutions in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school years to continue the provision of professional support services as University – School Support Programmes. For these four projects, EDB also conducted school visits to carry out on-site evaluations. Please provide:

- (a) information of participating schools that have been visited by EDB;
- (b) tabulate by each project, the number of participating schools, number of schools visited by EDB and their percentage;
- (c) tabulate by each project, the number of school visits and participating schools; and
- (d) whether EDB has monitored and ensured that the coverage and number of school visits are adequate. If affirmative, the details; if not, the reasons.

#### EDB's response

- (a) In the 2019/20 school year, 12 participating KGs and 13 participating primary schools were visited by EDB. Up to 17 May 2021, 9 participating KGs, 15 participating primary schools and 4 participating secondary schools have been visited by EDB in this school year.



(b) and (c)

Projects (2019/20 school year)	No. of participating schools	No. of schools visited (Note)	No. of school visits (Note)	Percentage of schools visited
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d) = (b)/(a) x 100%
Gearing Up Schools and Parents – Supporting NCS Kindergarten Students in Learning Chinese (NCS–KG)	17	9	12	53%
Growth with Ease: Effective Learning and Teaching of Chinese and Smooth Transition for Multicultural Students (NCS–K&P)	22	8	8	36%
Provision of School-based Professional Support Service on Enhancing the Learning and Teaching of Chinese for NCS Students in Primary Schools (NCS–P)	17	8	11	47%
Empowerment and Transition – Supporting Teachers to Promote Multicultural Students’ Chinese Learning in Primary and Secondary Schools (NCS–P&S)	The project has commenced in the 2020/21 school year.			

Note: Due to the deferral of class resumption/temporary suspension of face-to-face classes since February 2020 because of the epidemic situation of COVID-19, the number of school visits was slightly affected at the initial stage of the deferral of class resumption period. Yet, every effort has been made to arrange both on-site school visits and online meetings as far as practicable.

Projects (2020/21 school year) (as of 17 May 2021) (Note 1)	No. of participating schools	No. of schools visited (Note 2)	No. of school visits (Note 2)	Percentage of schools visited
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d) = (b)/(a) x 100%
NCS–KG	17	8	8	47%
NCS–K&P	22	6	7	27%
NCS–P	17	7	8	41%
NCS–P&S	24	7	8	29%

Notes:

1. School visits include both on-site school visits and online meetings.
  2. EDB’s monitoring of the 4 projects will continue until the end of this school year, and so the numbers and percentages in the table are not final.
- (d) EDB puts due emphasis on evaluating the quality of the services provided from a professional perspective, and setting straight-jacket quantitative performance indicators for schools of varying needs is not considered the most crucial success criteria. EDB officers monitored the effectiveness of the services through close communication with service providers via emails and phone calls. Regular on-site visits were paid to observe each type of support rendered by service providers, such as collaborative lesson planning meetings, lesson observation, and workshops, rather than giving direct support/visit to each and every school. The basic principle was that in order to have a comprehensive picture of the quality of services provided, the visits of EDB officers covered different types of support rendered by service providers with reference to the contextual needs of schools, rather than focusing on the number of visits to each school, which was considered not practical. During the period when face-to-face classes were suspended due to the epidemic situation, EDB officers joined the online meetings the service providers had with schools for collaborative planning, online lesson observation, etc. Internal suggestions have been provided to EDB officers for monitoring the services, including the frequency of school visits, as well as the nature and foci of the activities being observed. Such requirements have also been reiterated at regular meetings. In gist, EDB officers have always been committed to monitoring the quality of services through various means, including on-site visits, providing professional advice to service providers to facilitate their understanding of the school context, school needs and the principles stipulated in the curriculum guides.

In gist, the success of SBSS hinges on a number of factors, including quality of services rather than frequency of school visits, the breadth and depth of professional dialogues between EDB officers and different stakeholders (including service providers and school personnel) as well as the impacts on learning and teaching as observed. There cannot be a simple quantitative parameter to safeguard professional support services of qualitative nature in education. Nonetheless, EDB would continue reviewing and enhancing the existing measures for monitoring the services whenever necessary so as to enhance their quality.

Having said that, in response to Audit Commission's recommendation, the aforementioned internal suggestions are now being spelled out clearly. The guidelines will include service specifications for the service providers, frequency of EDB officers' monitoring visits, coverage and sampling method for schools being visited and other monitoring measures that are in place. A balance will be struck between the operational need and manpower available in EDB for monitoring visits without sacrificing the quality of the SBSS. The guidelines are expected to be ready before the start of the 2021/22 school year.

Please refer to our response to Question 14(d) and Question 15 in Appendix 1.

#### **Part 4: Other support measures**

- 11) According to Paragraph 4.3 to 4.7 of the Audit Report, EDB informed that the participation rate/attendance rate of the Student Support Programme is relatively low. Please advise:
- (a) whether EDB was aware of the above situation before Audit Commission' review;
  - (b) although EDB sends letters in August and September of each school year to all public sector primary and secondary schools and primary and secondary schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme and conducts a briefing session in September to invite them to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Student Support Programme, the attendance situation has not been improved. Does EDB agree that the measures for improving the participation rate/attendance rate of the Student Support Programme are not effective?
  - (c) whether EDB agrees that there is duplication of resources, as one of the reasons causing the relatively low participation rate/attendance rate of the Student Support Programme is that there may be time clashes with

other activities and programmes. If affirmative, how does EDB improve the situation; if not, why not;

- (d) whether EDB has liaised with the tertiary institution operating the Student Support Programme for offering more time slots (for example, Saturday afternoons, Sundays or weekday evenings);
- (e) whether EDB will take into account the participation rate/attendance rate of the Student Support Programme for calculating payment to the tertiary institution so as to encourage the institution to actively enrol/keep the students; and
- (f) whether EDB will request/suggest schools to accord top priority for NCS students to participate in the Student Support Programme, instead of other extra-curricular activities which are relatively less imminent, taking into consideration that learning Chinese is of considerable importance for integration of people of diverse races into the society of Hong Kong and also for their future development.

#### EDB's response

- (a) EDB has liaised closely with the service provider to keep in view students' attendance. The service provider is required to communicate regularly with participating schools and parents on students' learning progress, including their attendance situation.
- (b) Every year, EDB sends letters to schools and conducts a briefing session to promote the Student Support Programme (SSP), brief schools of the relevant arrangements, as well as to invite schools to nominate students in need to participate in the SSP. The number of students nominated and enrolled eventually depends on a number of factors such as whether school-based measures tailored for NCS students according to their own school context are available in a particular year, students' availability in terms of time arrangements, student cohorts' Chinese Language proficiency, etc. EDB has provided more resources to schools for developing tailor-made school-based programmes to suit the learning needs of their own students. It should be noted that the SSP is supplementary in nature and is only one of the choices available. EDB will review the complementarity of the SSP with other tailor-made programmes in the long run.
- (c) It is rather common for students to get engaged in a range of activities and programmes including both academic and extra-curricular in nature. The SSP, as a supplementary learning programme by its very nature, is one of the choices available. It is understandable that at times there may be clashes

with other activities and programmes. That said, students will still benefit by joining part, if not all, of the SSP. EDB will review the complementarity of the programme with other activities and programmes in the long run.

Before commencement of the SSP, EDB offers assistance to the service provider in arranging venues in convenient locations easily accessible to participating students, with a view to minimising their commuting time to attend the programme. During the course of the programme, EDB has liaised closely with the service provider to keep in view of students' attendance. Besides, the service provider has been requested to communicate regularly with participating schools and parents on students' learning progress and attendance situation. In case of frequent absentees, EDB will request the service provider and participating schools concerned to take follow-up actions to render appropriate assistance, e.g. changing class or venue for students in need. Although students joining the programme should, in principle, attend all the lessons and activities, there are various factors affecting students' attendance including casual leaves, having time clashes with other activities/programmes, parental involvement and recognition of its importance, etc. EDB will continue to monitor the situation and offer suitable assistance to schools and students.

- (d) According to the 2020-22 two-year service contract, the SSP is operated after school hours and during non-public school holidays (including Saturdays) to facilitate students to attend the programme conveniently. EDB will liaise with the tertiary institution concerned on the feasibility of providing more time slots for the programme.
- (e) According to the 2020-22 two-year service contract, calculation of payment to the tertiary institution conducting the SSP is based on the number of classes conducted and the number of instructional hours. In the next tendering exercise of 2022-2024, EDB will consider including students' participation rate/attendance rate as one of the factors for calculating payment so as to encourage the tertiary institution(s) concerned to actively enrol/retain the students.
- (f) EDB will continue to liaise closely with participating schools to remind them to coordinate with the service provider with a view to facilitating students to attend the SSP. For example, we will suggest schools to make reference to the timetable of the SSP when arranging extra-curricular activities for NCS students, so that a suitable balance between joining various extra-curricular activities and the SSP can be obtained. EDB will also liaise with participating schools in advance on the timetable of the programme to facilitate them to devise their school calendars and allocate different time slots to the programme and other lessons/extra-curricular activities.

- 12) According to paragraphs 4.8 and 4.9 of the Audit Report, NCS students enrolled in the Student Support Programme are divided into study groups according to school levels. However, the Chinese Language proficiency of NCS students of the same school level/age group can be very diverse. Hence, paragraph 4.10 of the Audit Report recommends EDB to arrange students into learning groups of appropriate levels according to their learning needs so as to cater for their individual learning needs. Please advise on the timeframe for taking this measure.

#### EDB's response

EDB agrees with the audit recommendation and will liaise with the service provider to conduct an early assessment of the Chinese Language proficiency of participating students in the 2021/22 school year for arranging them into different learning groups according to their performance.

- 13) According to paragraphs 4.21 of the Audit Report, Audit Commission examined 50 school reports of the schools participating in the Summer Bridging Programme in the period from 2017 to 2020 and noted that some of the school reports omitted some of the required information. Please advise:
- (a) whether EDB found that it was not able to ensure participating schools in the Summer Bridging Programme to have included all the necessary information in their annual school reports through conducting random checking and offering verbal advice; and
  - (b) the measures to be taken by EDB to ensure that the participating schools of the Summer Bridging Programme will include all the necessary information in their annual school reports with a view to enhancing accountability and transparency of their operation of the Programme.

#### EDB's response

- (a) After conducting random checking, EDB has found that some participating schools were not able to upload the necessary information onto their school websites due to various reasons, e.g. the school reports were pending endorsement of the Incorporated Management Committee by the end of November.
- (b) EDB will continue to remind participating schools to include the necessary information of the Programme in their annual school reports for uploading

onto the school websites by the end of November. Starting from the 2021/22 school year, EDB will send letters to remind all participating schools of this requirement. Besides, EDB will continue to check the school reports on the websites of respective schools. In case schools are not able to upload the school reports accordingly or some of the required information is omitted, EDB will contact the schools concerned to offer advice and assistance in a timely manner.

- 14) According to paragraph 4.26 of the Audit Report, the demand from schools for life planning education services for NCS students was high, but the responses from the service providers to EDB's invitations were lukewarm. Would EDB please provide/advise:
- (a) the source/list of the service providers having been invited;
  - (b) whether the service providers' lukewarm responses were due to a lack of skills and experience in providing services for NCS students;
  - (c) whether EDB has contacted relevant foreign consulates, chambers of commerce, clansmen /expatriates associations, etc. to search for or solicit more service providers for life planning education services for NCS students;
  - (d) whether EDB has explored the feasibility to invest more resources to increase the capacity for providing life planning education services. If so, please provide further information; and
  - (e) whether EDB has gained experience in how to plan and monitor the support measures implemented for NCS students to be more effective in future.

#### EDB's response

- (a) We understand that there are only a limited number of service providers providing life planning education services for NCS students. EDB has not compiled a list of suppliers on providing life planning education services for NCS students. The five service providers were selected based on EDB's best knowledge and understanding of the service providers that have experience in providing life planning education services to secondary schools.
- (b) EDB has contacted the service providers and learnt that they did not submit any bids mainly because: (i) they had insufficient manpower to run a new

programme; (ii) they had no interest in starting a new programme; and (iii) they had concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic.

- (c) EDB will continue to liaise with schools, the Hong Kong Association of Careers Masters and Guidance Masters and related organisations /associations to identify other potential service providers so as to expand the invitation list as far as possible. For the provision of services for the 2021/22 and 2022/23 school years, we have invited tenders through open tendering procedures.
  - (d) EDB will explore the feasibility of increasing the quota of participating schools for the on-site support services for the 2021-2023 contract period with the commissioned service provider. EDB will also explore other alternatives to increase the capacity for life planning education services.
  - (e) EDB will continue to pay attention to and constantly review the demand for life planning education services for NCS students, and will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the services through collecting views of teachers and students during visits and sharing sessions, conducting evaluation meetings with the service provider and evaluating the findings in the report compiled by the service provider.
- 15) According to paragraph 4.34 of the Audit Report, the Audit Commission has examined the webpages of 105 KGs joining the Scheme, of which 47 KGs did not indicate on their webpages that they would provide interpretation and/or translation services, or allow NCS children and their parents to be accompanied by a Chinese-speaking relative/friend during the interview to facilitate communication. Please advise the reasons for not monitoring the school-based mechanisms of the KGs concerned, which are not in line with paragraph 4.32 of the Audit Report that their school-based admission mechanism must be fair, just and open, and not in compliance with the existing anti-discrimination legislation. Please advise the actions taken by EDB to improve the situation.

#### EDB's response

Regarding KG admission, KGs are reminded via the annual circular memorandum and regular briefings that equal opportunities must be provided for all children (regardless of races, genders and abilities), and their school-based admission mechanisms must be fair, just and open, and in compliance with the relevant anti-discrimination legislation. The relevant circular memorandum clearly stipulates that KGs should arrange interpretation and/or translation services for applicants as necessary, or allow parents and children to be accompanied by a Chinese-speaking relative/friend during the interview to facilitate communication. Since



KGs are not required to indicate such arrangements on their school webpage, some KGs may inform the parents of NCS children of such arrangements through other channels (e.g. verbal communication) without indicating such information on the school webpages.

We accept the Audit Commission's recommendation and will follow up accordingly. In the relevant annual circular memorandum, KGs will be required to indicate on their school webpages that when interviewing NCS children, NCS applicants may inform KGs if interpretation and/or translation services are needed. KGs should also let NCS parents know that they can be accompanied by a Chinese-speaking relative/friend during the interview.

Education Bureau  
27 May 2021