

Chapter 2: Education support measures for non-Chinese speaking students

The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review of the education support measures of the Education Bureau ("EDB") for non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students.¹

2. Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him declared that he was a former Chairman of Board of Governors of English Schools Foundation.

3. EDB has introduced a series of enhanced measures to support NCS students' effective learning of Chinese language since 2014-2015 school year (other than calendar years, all years mentioned in this chapter refer to school years). In the period from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020, the total number of NCS students attending kindergartens under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme or the kindergarten education scheme, public sector primary schools, secondary schools and special schools, and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools increased by 2 908 (12.6%) from 23 021 to 25 929. The number of NCS students as a percentage of all students increased from 3.0% to 3.4%. During the same period, the expenditure on the education support measures for NCS students increased by \$211.8 million (87%) from \$244.5 million to \$456.3 million.

4. The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit's Report No. 76 ("the Audit Report"):

Funding support to schools

- in 2018-2019, of the 152 kindergartens receiving enhanced additional funding support for NCS students ("NCS Grant"),² 60 (39%) and 73 (48%) submitted their school plans and school reports³ late respectively. Out of the 266 primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant of \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million, 168 (63%) and 176 (66%) submitted their school plans and school reports late respectively;

¹ EDB refers to students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese as NCS students.

² EDB provides eligible schools with NCS Grant to enhance the support for NCS students in learning the Chinese language and the creation of an inclusive learning environment in schools. Please refer to paragraph 2.2 of the Audit Report for details.

³ EDB requires schools to submit a school plan and a school report on the deployment of NCS Grant and the support measures every year. Please refer to paragraph 2.7 of the Audit Report for the submission deadlines of school plans and school reports for kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and special schools.

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- 20 (15%) of the 137 kindergartens receiving NCS Grant in both 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 and 7 (17%) of the 41 primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant of \$50,000 every year from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019 utilized less than 70% of the total Grant amount;
- of the 283 primary, secondary and special schools that first received NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million in any school year in the period from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019, 44 (15%) were neither visited by EDB in the school year they first received the Grant nor visited in the following two school years.⁴ By the end of 2019-2020, 26 (9%) schools, which were special schools, had not yet been visited by EDB;
- EDB collected on a yearly basis, through questionnaires, feedback from major stakeholders of the primary and secondary schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million on the implementation of support measures for NCS students by schools. Although there were 433 kindergartens and 52 special schools admitting NCS students in 2019-2020, the survey did not cover these schools;

Capacity building for teachers

- EDB had not set training requirements for schools on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language. In 2019-2020, there were 988 primary, secondary and special schools (with or without NCS students), and 13 794 teachers teaching Chinese Language at these schools. During the period from 2014-2015 to 2019-2020, 9 986 (72%) of the 13 794 teachers teaching Chinese Language did not attend EDB's training,⁵ and 252 (26%) of the 988 schools did not have teachers who had attended EDB's training. Of the 252 schools, 157 (62%) had NCS students;

⁴ EDB conducts supervisory visits to all kindergartens receiving NCS Grant and primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million to monitor the schools' use of NCS Grant.

⁵ EDB organizes professional development programmes on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language (for teachers of primary, secondary and special schools) and on supporting the learning and teaching of NCS students (for teachers in kindergartens joining kindergarten education scheme).

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- from the launch of the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language)⁶ in 2014-2015 to end of October 2020, only 89 teachers were approved under the Scheme to undertake structured part-time training programmes, representing only 20% of the maximum number of 450 teachers that the Scheme aimed to support;
- in each school year from 2014-2015 to 2019-2020, only 106 to 142 schools with NCS students (10% to 14% of the total number of schools with NCS students) received school-based support services ("SBSS").⁷ Of the 723 schools with NCS students every year throughout the period, 438 (61%) did not receive any SBSS;

Other support measures

- since 2007, EDB had commissioned a tertiary institution to run the Student Support Programme for NCS students. The institution offered remedial programmes after school hours or during holidays for NCS students who were less proficient in Chinese. NCS students enrolled in the Programme were divided into about 50 study groups according to school levels. Audit found that:
 - (a) from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020, the number of schools nominating NCS students to enrol in the Programme decreased by 48 (38%) from 128 to 80, and the number of NCS students nominated to enrol in the Programme decreased by 217 (22%) from 974 to 757;
 - (b) in each school year in the period from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020, around 51% to 57% of the students found that the study materials used in the study groups were not at the appropriate level of difficulty for them;⁸
 - (c) from 2016-2017 to 2018-2019, 437 (20%) of the 2 195 enrolled NCS students dropped out from the Programme, and in

⁶ The objective of the Scheme is to provide funding support to help Chinese Language teachers at primary, secondary and special schools acquire relevant qualifications and structured training about the teaching of Chinese to NCS students on a voluntary basis. Please refer to paragraph 3.9 of the Audit Report for details.

⁷ EDB provides SBSS to help teachers cater for the needs of NCS students in learning Chinese. Please refer to paragraph 3.15 of the Audit Report for details.

⁸ Please refer to paragraph 4.9 of the Audit Report for details.

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each school year, 15 to 21 study groups had average attendance rates at or below 60%; and

- (d) in the period from 2017-2018 to 2018-2019, EDB conducted lesson observations⁹ on 42 study groups. Audit examination of the visit reports revealed that 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;
- although the number of NCS students eligible to participate in the Summer Bridging Programme¹⁰ increased by 1 226 (22%) from 5 602 in 2013 to 6 828 in 2019, the number of participants decreased by 590 (34%) from 1 730 in 2013 to 1 140 in 2019;
 - EDB implemented a pilot project from 2015-2016 to provide life planning education services to NCS students and regularized the services from 2018-2019 onwards. In the period from 2018-2019 to 2020-2021, Audit found that:
 - (a) EDB sent invitations of quotation to the same five service providers every year, but four (80%) of the five service providers did not respond in 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 and three (60%) did not respond in 2019-2020; and
 - (b) due to the limited capacity of the service provider, the numbers of schools and NCS students with unsuccessful applications for the services each year ranged from 7 to 20 and 121 to 497 respectively. The percentages of schools and NCS students with unsuccessful applications each year ranged from 30% to 56% and 35% to 61% respectively;
 - in January 2021, Audit examined the websites of 105 kindergartens joining kindergarten education scheme in three districts with a significant number of NCS students and discovered that 47 (45%)

⁹ EDB conducts lesson observations to monitor the Student Support Programme. During lesson observations, course instructors' performance and students' performance are rated by EDB staff on a scale of 1 to 4. A higher rating represents a better performance. Visit reports are prepared for follow-up and record purposes.

¹⁰ EDB invites primary schools to run the Summer Bridging Programme during summer vacation to facilitate upcoming Primary 1 NCS students' adaptation to the classroom setting with the use of the Chinese language and help NCS students progress to Primary 2 to 4.

kindergartens 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 admission interview; and

- although EDB required secondary schools to make public prior to admission the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion for the Discretionary Places stage of the Secondary School Places Allocation System, of the 52 secondary schools whose websites were examined by Audit in January 2021, 15 (29%) had made public the information only in Chinese.

5. The Committee asked for written responses regarding the measures to: (a) improve the funding support to schools; (b) enhance the capacity of Chinese Language teachers in teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language; (c) boost the participation rates and effectiveness of the Student Support Programme, the Summer Bridging Programme and the life planning education services; and (d) enhance transparency of information about local schools to facilitate NCS students and their parents in making school choices. The replies from the **Secretary for Education** are in *Appendices 7 and 8*.

6. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.