

For discussion on 21 June 2004

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Secondary School Places Allocation Arrangement for Children of Ethnic Minorities

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the revised Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) arrangement for ethnic minority students (referred hereafter as non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) students) as from the 2004 allocation cycle.

Previous allocation arrangement

2. The SSPA mechanism consists of two stages : Discretionary Places (DP) stage and Central Allocation (CA) stage. At the DP stage, both Chinese speaking and NCS Primary 6 students may apply to any one participating secondary school without the restriction of school net.

3. The major difference in the previous SSPA arrangement for Chinese speaking and NCS students lay in the CA stage. To cater for NCS students' special language needs, a separate list of secondary schools offering a third language (e.g. French or Urdu) and accepting this group of students was provided for parents' choice in the CA stage. Students who indicated themselves to be NCS students would have their school choices limited to only these schools. Normally, these schools totalled not more than 10. Given the limited school choices, the S1 places for NCS students were allocated on a territory-wide rather than a school net basis. Allocation of NCS students to these NCS places were conducted according to students' allocation band, random number and parental choice of schools, just like the mechanism for their Chinese speaking counterparts.

Revised allocation arrangement

4. While the previous practice of arranging a separate list of schools for NCS students was a well-intentioned one stemming from a special language consideration for them, many parents of the NCS students have expressed

concerns about the limited number of school choices and the long home-to-school travelling distance. Besides, many NCS students were locally born to Hong Kong permanent residents of a non-Chinese ethnic origin. There have also been calls for treatment in school allocation on par with local students so that NCS students' future academic and career pursuits locally would not be prejudiced. In addition, they see the benefit for their children to integrate early into the local education system and the society at large, including the ability to communicate effectively in written and spoken Chinese.

5. It has been an established Government policy to facilitate the early integration of NCS children into the local education system. Implicit in this policy is the acceptance that school education constitutes one of the best timing and avenues for fostering genuine integration and social harmony. Hence the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), taking into account the justified wishes of ethnic minority parents for genuine integration, considers that restricting NCS students to a separate school list may no longer be a suitable arrangement.

6. EMB thus initiated discussions and exchange views with concern groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the revised allocation arrangements for NCS students. We also discussed with Members of the Ethnic Minorities Forum¹ the revised arrangement in the meeting held by the Home Affairs Bureau in November 2003. They were generally positive to the proposed changes and supported the integration policy.

7. In addition, we consulted the SSPA Committee² in November 2003. Members were on the whole positive towards the integration policy and considered that the revised allocation arrangements would benefit the NCS students.

8. Starting from this allocation year (i.e. admission to S1 in the 2004/05 school year), NCS students will be allocated S1 places in the same manner as their Chinese counterparts. The difference between the previous and revised SSPA arrangement is illustrated in the flowchart at the Annex. However, we appreciate that some NCS primary students may have had little exposure to Chinese language and hence have a genuine need to study in secondary schools which traditionally admit a greater number of NCS students. Therefore,

¹ The Forum comprises representatives of 9 ethnic minority organizations from 6 communities (Indian, Pakistani, Nepalese, Filipino, Indonesian and Thai) and 6 NGOs.

² This is an advisory body overseeing the operation of the SSPA system. It consists mainly of school heads from 18 school nets and representatives of major school councils and associations.

adequate S1 places of these secondary schools have been provided in school nets with NCS students. In other words, NCS students now have a choice of opting for mainstream schools or schools which traditionally admit more NCS students. The revised allocation arrangement would benefit the NCS students in the following ways :

- Provide NCS students and their parents with more school choices and the flexibility to choose schools which traditionally admit NCS students and the mainstream schools;
- Provide NCS students with the opportunity to broaden their exposure to Chinese language;
- Provide NCS students and their parents with the choice for deeper integration into the local education system and the community; and
- Shorten the home-to-school travelling distance.

9. To facilitate NCS parents and students to make an informed choice of schools under the revised allocation arrangement, EMB proactively organized a briefing session on the revised SSPA arrangements for NCS parents in March 2004. We also made active effort to keep close contacts with primary schools with NCS students and attended their briefing sessions for parents on the SSPA system. The ‘*Additional Notes for Parents of NCS Students*’ in making school choices were translated into 3 languages (Hindi, Urdu and Nepalese) for parents’ easy reference. Furthermore, an assessment tool was provided to help primary schools with NCS students to assess the students’ Chinese standard so as to facilitate parents to make suitable and informed school choices.

Related Support Measures

10. We are aware of the learning and adaptation needs of the NCS students allocated to mainstream schools as well as the needs to strengthen the support to schools which may not have the experience in taking care of NCS students. Given below are some specific support measures being / to be provided to cater for NCS students’ learning and adaptation needs:

(a) *Providing school-based support*

On-site school-based curriculum support will be provided. Officers with experience in teaching Chinese to children whose first language is non-Chinese have been recruited to strengthen the curriculum support for these schools. Officers would visit the schools regularly to work in collaboration with teachers to tailor/adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of their

students and give advice on curriculum planning, teaching, learning and assessment strategies and the effective use of learning and teaching resources.

(b) *Forming a mutual support network*

We will help the schools allocated with NCS children to build up a school network of mutual support and sharing good practices. Experience sharing sessions and workshops will be held to familiarise mainstream schools with the tradition, culture and habits of NCS students, and also to enable them to draw reference from the good practices of those schools which have admitted a greater number of NCS children. Regular professional development activities and thematic sessions on teaching and learning will be conducted for schools in the network.

(c) *Developing an e-sharing platform*

We are developing a webpage which aims to provide a platform for all language teachers to share their experiences in school-based curriculum development and resources developed to cater for different needs of learners. Catering for the learning needs of NCS students will be one of the foci of sharing. Exemplary school-based practices in enhancing learning motivation of NCS students, successful learning experiences of NCS students, curriculum plans and learning and teaching materials developed by teachers, useful articles and reference materials, etc. will be shared.

(d) *Existing support for newly arrived ethnic minority children*

(i) School-based Support Scheme

Under the scheme, schools which admit newly arrived ethnic minority children are provided with a grant calculated on a per capita basis of the newly arrived children admitted by the school. Schools can flexibly make use of the grant to run school-based support programmes for the children to help them integrate into the education system, for example, by running supplementary language classes.

(ii) Induction Programme

It is a 60-hour programme run by NGOs under government subvention. The programme contents include knowing the environment, basic learning skills and Chinese language.

(iii) Initiation Programme

The programme is a full time 6-month one aiming at providing the

newly arrived children real classroom experience so as to enhance their ability in Chinese and English languages, helping them in adjusting to the local society and their personal development. Newly arrived children may choose to attend the programme first before joining schools. Placement assistance is provided after completing the programme.

11. We would liaise closely with schools allocated with NCS students and see to the needs of schools, parents and students and provide the needed support as appropriate.

Advice sought

12. Members are invited to note the revised arrangement for NCS students and give advice.

Education and Manpower Bureau
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