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16 May 2008

Dr Hon Cheung Chiu Hung, Fernando
Legislative Council
8 Jackson Road
Central

Dear Dr Cheung

**Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to the Provision of
Boarding Places, Senior Secondary Education and Employment
Opportunities for Children with Special Educational Needs**

**Education for non-Chinese-speaking children
with special educational needs**

I refer to the Financial Secretary's reply dated 24 April 2008 to you, stating that the Secretary for Education would give you a further reply to explain our policy on the education for non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) students with special educational needs (SEN).

The Administration has always attached great importance to education, and tremendous efforts and resources have been devoted to it to cater for the needs of all students, including NCS students and those with SEN. Like other developed countries which provide support and remedial services for newly arrived non-local students to help them adapt to the local education system, we adopt an inclusion policy for all NCS students. Not only do we offer newly arrived NCS children with school

places in public sector schools, but we also provide various types of support and remedial services to help them integrate into the local education system. On top of this, we provide public sector schools with additional support and resources to cater for the needs of students with SEN, including the NCS students.

On language in education, Chinese is the main medium of instruction in most primary and secondary schools, with English taught as a core subject from Primary One. We also have quite a number of public sector schools adopting English as the teaching medium. Since Chinese and English are the two official languages in Hong Kong, NCS children, including those with SEN, are encouraged to study in public sector schools adopting Chinese or English as the teaching medium to facilitate their integration into the local community. In general, schools are obliged to cater for the diverse needs of their students and the Education Bureau provides additional funding and support to facilitate these schools to implement integrated education. In sum, it is our prevailing policy to accommodate the needs of NCS students with SEN in the public school sector through various measures. If there is any unmet demand for services in the public sector, we are prepared to tackle the problem by examining provisions for the sector.

Notwithstanding, there are other education opportunities outside the public sector for NCS students, including those with SEN, who have their own language and /or curriculum preference. Fifteen English Schools Foundation (ESF) Schools receiving a small percentage of their income from government funding and 38 private international schools are providing alternatives for NCS students. These are alternatives outside the public sector to provide choices in an open market, with minimum intervention from the Government. By design, they are not intended for meeting any unmet demand for services in the public sector.

Regarding international schools' role in supporting SEN students, we would like to emphasize that while it is our established policy not to micro-manage the international schools, which are operated on a self-financing basis in the commercial market, the schools should provide equal opportunities for all students in terms of student admission, teaching curriculum and assessment, etc. We appreciate the Subcommittee's concern on the provision of learning support classes and special education places in ESF schools which also receive some subvention from the Government. Notwithstanding that there will be a

separate subvention review upon implementation of the governance reform of ESF, we will adopt an open mind to explore with ESF the possibility of further enhancing the provision of school places and support for NCS students with SEN in parallel.

Please rest assured that we will continue to strive hard to provide quality service to support all students, irrespective of their ethnic origin and physical or mental ability, and accord appropriate priority to competing demands in a prudent manner.

Yours sincerely

(Miss P L WU)
for Secretary for Education

c.c. Financial Secretary
Secretary for Labour and Welfare