

Legislative Council Panel on Education

Education for Children of Ethnic Minorities

Purpose

This paper aims to share with Members the views of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on education for ethnic minority children. For the purpose of this paper, ethnic minority children, or non-Chinese speaking (NCS) children generally refer to South Asian children who are residing in Hong Kong.

Education for Ethnic Minority Students

2. It is noted that before the allocation cycle of 2004, NCS children admitting to Primary 1 through the Primary One Allocation (POA) Scheme or to Secondary 1 through the Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) arrangement were only given the choice of a few schools that traditionally admitted a larger number of NCS children. Some ethnic minority parents and stakeholder groups considered that such arrangements were not conducive to integration. They believed that early integration could facilitate NCS children's future academic and career pursuits locally, given the reality that most of them would choose to stay in Hong Kong for good. In response to the wishes of the parents and the views of the stakeholder groups, starting from the 2004 allocation exercise onwards, NCS children admitting to Primary 1 or Secondary 1 are given the choice of opting for mainstream schools or schools that traditionally admit a larger number of ethnic minority students.

EOC's Views

3. The EOC welcomes any measure that could enhance the access to quality education of NCS students. However, genuine integration could not be achieved merely by placing NCS children in mainstream schools. Having regard to the different cultural background of these children whose ability to communicate in Chinese, both in speaking and writing, is very limited, adequate support should be provided in the school environment in order to provide them a level playing field.

4. In these few years, the Government has been strengthening the support for schools which have admitted NCS children. In communicating with some stakeholder groups, EOC considers that some of their suggestions are worth exploring for furtherance of fuller integration of NCS students into the mainstream education system:

- ◆ Some ethnic minority parents worry that under the new POA and SSPA arrangements, NCS students are too thinly spread over individual schools which may result in the feelings of loneliness and isolation. In addition, due to the small critical mass, accommodation or special measures provided for NCS children within individual schools may become very costly and difficult, if not impossible. It is suggested that supporting services such as language classes, counseling services for NCS students within the same school net should be centralized for better rationalization of resources. This will also allow NCS students to have better peer sharing and mutual support which is conducive to smooth integration.
- ◆ It is also proposed that an alternative Chinese curriculum should be developed for NCS students with equal accreditation as the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination. Reference could be made to the curriculum of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) which have universal recognition. If students have capacity and resources allowed, NCS students should be given the opportunity to learn their mother language in order to maintain cultural diversity.
- ◆ Periodic research and evaluation should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the new POA and SSPA arrangement and the respective supporting measures, and the result of which should be made known to the stakeholder groups. Consultations with parents, teachers, students and concern groups will be useful to gather views and suggestions which are important in providing appropriate accommodation to cater for the special needs of NCS students.
- ◆ Support should be given to cultivate a multicultural environment in schools so that children from different cultural background can enjoy a close-knit setting. To this effect, acceptance and support from the Chinese speaking parents and students is essential.

5. The EOC believes that integrating NCS children into mainstream schools does not only benefit NCS students but also their Chinese speaking counterparts. As English is often the preferred medium of communication for NCS students, learning together with NCS students would create a bilingual school environment for local Chinese speaking students.

6. The EOC is pleased to share its experience in the implementation of integrated education for students with disabilities into mainstream schools. This can provide reference as to how to effectively help the minorities to integrate into the broader community with due regard to their individual differences. Schools that have extensive experience in serving NCS students could also act as a resource point to provide support and advice to their professional counterparts.

7. The EOC recognizes that there are inherent difficulties in moving ahead to integrate NCS students into the mainstream education system without regard to their diverse cultural background. Therefore, we should be mindful that in achieving the objective of having one harmonious society, cultural diversity should be respected.

Equal Opportunities Commission
December 2005