

For discussion on 12 December 2011

Legislative Council Panel on Education
Education Support for Non-Chinese Speaking Students

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the observations and considerations for charting the way forward, in particular the measures relating to the learning of the Chinese language under a common curriculum framework, support to schools and promotion of an early start for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students to study the Chinese language, upon examining the education support measures for NCS students, to facilitate their integration into the community having taken into account views of stakeholders including further dialogue with the Equal Opportunities Commission in response to its Working Group Report issued on 11 July 2011.

Chinese Curriculum and Benchmark Test

2. Our curriculum framework is vibrant and flexible enough to provide students with more diverse choices of progression pathways. This “one curriculum framework for all” approach enables flexible tailoring of the core curriculum elements to meet students’ including NCS students’ needs, interests and abilities. While some NCS students starting late and not having the opportunity to study the full Chinese curriculum have chosen to attain recognised alternative Chinese qualifications in overseas examinations, others have sat for the Chinese Language examination in the defunct Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) like their local counterparts. Notwithstanding the smaller number of NCS students involved, some have been able to attain Grade E / Level 2 or above in the HKCEE. In 2011, 17 out of 64 NCS students studying in Secondary 7 of public-sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools who sat for the HKALE have received offers from institutions under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS). Separately, about 250 NCS students are taking full-time locally accredited self-financing degree or sub-degree programmes. An alternative curriculum and assessment with pre-set simpler contents and lower standards would limit the range of

learning opportunities for NCS students with different needs and aspirations and also undermine their opportunities for further studies. In addition, the credibility of such qualifications in the eyes of the employers remains to be ascertained. Research findings have also revealed that given support and duly empowered, NCS students can learn at a pace and achieve results on par with those of local students.

3. To address the practical needs of NCS students in learning the Chinese language, we have issued the “Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for NCS Students” (“the Supplementary Guide”) in December 2008 alongside a series of teaching and learning (T&L) materials including “textbooks” covering different learning stages of the primary and secondary levels¹. The Supplementary Guide, including four curriculum modes² pitched with different learning levels, caters for the diverse needs and aspirations of NCS students and supports their learning of the Chinese language at different stages of development.

Multiple pathways

4. These multiple curriculum modes may lead to different exits such as Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE), General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), hence multiple progression pathways for NCS students. In tandem, to enhance NCS students’ competitiveness in the workplace, a pilot scheme on Workplace Chinese Language with programmes pegged to the Qualifications Framework will be implemented this academic year. We also look forward to the synergy in this regard when the Vocational Training Council sets up one more youth college to provide specialised support for NCS students.

5. In practice, schools are adapting the Chinese Language curriculum with reference to the Supplementary Guide. In this sense, schools are already working on the basis of an alternative Chinese Language curriculum within one broad and balanced curriculum framework, catering for NCS students’ needs of learning Chinese as a second language. To help NCS students reinforce what they have learnt in Chinese language classes at schools, we have commissioned the University of Hong Kong to operate the Chinese Language Learning Support Centres to offer remedial

¹ The two sets of “textbooks” are products of adaptation and consolidation of those learning and teaching materials found effective and collected from experienced schools.

² The four curriculum modes include “immersion in Chinese Language lessons”, “bridging/transition”, “specific learning purposes” and “integration”.

courses after school and/or during holidays and provided funding to non-designated schools to put in place diversified extended Chinese learning programmes and organised Summer Bridging Programmes for NCS students in primary schools. The results are encouraging and confirm our belief that NCS children are capable of learning the Chinese curriculum when high expectations are set and support are given.

Refinement of T&L

6. Notwithstanding the wide acceptance of the Supplementary Guide with multiple curriculum modes by schools on sound pedagogical grounds and experiences of other places, findings on student learning outcomes do suggest that we should acknowledge the need for a more coherent and comprehensive form of support to be provided to schools to gear up the implementation of the Supplementary Guide, particularly in helping NCS students cross over different learning levels leading to multiple progression pathways mentioned above.

7. First and foremost, we find it essential to strengthen the feedback loop to facilitate targeted professional support for NCS students and their teachers. We will explore if the application of the assessment tools developed by the University of Hong Kong, which seeks to set specific learning objectives to enhance the effectiveness of T&L with reference to the assessment results covering the dimensions of characters recognition, characters writing, listening, speaking, reading and writing for schools' internal assessment, could be more structured to provide data to facilitate an objective assessment and form an evidence-based feedback loop at both system and school levels.

Designated Schools

8. Our school system is open to all students including NCS students. We have abided by the Race Discrimination Ordinance having taken into account stakeholders' views when adopting the approach to support NCS students through designated schools. The role of designated schools, which have been set up since 2006/07 to serve as anchors for supporting other schools also admitting NCS students with intensive on-site school-based support and recurrent grant, particularly in rendering assistance in developing school-based support measures, T&L materials, etc. and sharing of their experience with other schools admitting NCS students through the established network, should be recognised.

9. Notwithstanding the increase of designated schools from 15 in 2006/07 to 30 in 2011/12, we are mindful that designated schools notably those “which traditionally admit a greater number of NCS students” under the Primary One Admission (POA) System are admitting more NCS students. It is noteworthy that NCS students can choose to enroll in mainstream schools and that a school becomes a designated school and enrolls more NCS students not by design of the Education Bureau. Rather, it is a result of parental choice. We do see the merits of providing NCS parents with more school choices in view of encouraging NCS students to go to mainstream schools and facilitating the development of a more desirable mix of local and NCS students within a school so as to provide a more conducive environment for NCS students in the learning of the Chinese language.

10. Our progressive understanding of the more deep-rooted issues relating to education services for NCS students has brought to the fore the imperative of a more holistic and co-ordinated approach to rendering support to NCS students so as to facilitate their integration into the community. The proposed scaling up of support to NCS students through schools should be two-pronged. On one hand, we will formulate a more co-ordinated implementation plan for supporting schools admitting NCS students such that the support services are more oriented to schools and students. On the other hand, we will enlarge the school network to gear up the implementation of the Supplementary Guide to support NCS students to cater for their diverse aspirations, needs and learning pace with articulation to multiple progression pathways through attaining different recognised Chinese qualifications and crossing over the different learning levels in the T&L of Chinese as mentioned in paragraph 4 above. To make more schools appealing to NCS parents, we are inclined to have a comprehensive review of the existing support for designated schools with due considerations to the needs of other schools which also admit NCS students, the need for having more measurable targets and outcomes of schools in supporting NCS students, and the ways to enhance the development of T&L resources and sharing of experiences amongst schools.

11. Besides, we will explore the implementation of a few pilot district-based projects to enhance NCS students’ interest in the T&L of Chinese through arts and cultural activities with funding from the Language Fund.

Promotion of Early Adaptation

12. We have taken the opportunity of the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) introduced in 2007 with subsequent refinement announced in the Policy Address 2011-12 to widen parental choice and facilitate accessibility of children including NCS children to quality pre-primary education. To facilitate NCS children's early adaptation to the local education system, we will step up the promotion of an early start for NCS children to study the Chinese language for better adaptation to local primary schools and render professional support to pre-primary institutions as appropriate. In addition to the existing communication channels including conducting dedicated regular briefing sessions and issue of leaflets which have been translated into major ethnic minorities (EM) languages, we would explore further how to dovetail the promotion of an early start with the enhanced measures to support the EM announced in the Policy Address 2011-12 such as engaging schools which have performed well in the support of NCS students to render support to schools admitting NCS students, disseminating key messages to parents at the Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities funded by Home Affairs Department, in the EM radio programmes of RTHK, at the Maternal and Child Health Centres through promotion videos and in the EM newspapers, etc.

Way Forward

13. The support measures for NCS students are developmental in nature and subject to refinement as appropriate to meet the changing circumstances and needs. We will map out the implementation details to refine the support measures as mentioned above and continue to evaluate the effectiveness by taking into consideration feedback from schools, NCS parents and students and views of different stakeholders.

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