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Panel on Education

Meeting on 9 July 2013

Background brief on education support for non-Chinese speaking students

Purpose

This paper provides an updated summary of the deliberations of Members on major issues relating to education support for non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students.

Background

Existing arrangements

2. According to the Education Bureau ("EDB"), it is committed to assisting all non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students in adapting to the local education system and integrating into the community as early as possible. All eligible local children, including NCS children of ethnic minorities ("EM"), are entitled to 12-year free education. EDB has been providing school placement services to newly-arrived children, including NCS children. Parents of EM children can apply to schools direct, or through EDB which has pledged to arrange places for these children within 21 working days. Newly-arrived children may choose to enroll into a full-time six-month Initiation Programme prior to their entry to mainstream schools. Those who choose to enter mainstream schools direct will be provided with a part-time 60-hour Induction Programme operated by non-governmental organizations. Public-sector schools and schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme admitting these children are provided with a School-based Support Scheme Grant to operate school-based support programmes. Starting from the 2004 allocation

cycle for admission to Primary One and Secondary One, EM students may opt to enroll in mainstream schools, or schools that traditionally admit a large number of EM students.

Report published by the Equal Opportunities Commission

3. In July 2010, the Equal Opportunities Commission ("EOC") established the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities to explore measures to provide EM students with a level playing field in the education system. According to EOC, while the views received from different stakeholders were diverse, there were common concerns of which learning Chinese language is seen to be the most daunting. The Working Group issued its report on 11 July 2011 ("the EOC Report") which contained a set of recommendations. A copy of EOC's submission accompanying the EOC Report provided to the Panel on Education ("the Panel") is at **Appendix I**.

Deliberations on major issues of concern

4. The subject of the provision of education support for NCS students has received ongoing attention by the Panel. Recent discussion took place at the Panel meetings on 14 March, 12 December 2011 and 12 November 2012. Members also raised concerns and questions at the special meetings of the Finance Committee ("FC") to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014. At the Legislative Council meeting of 8 February 2012, Members passed a motion on "Reviewing the education policy for ethnic minority students" which was moved by Hon Abraham SHEK and amended by Hon Tanya CHAN and Hon Starry LEE. The wording of the motion passed is at **Appendix II**. The views and concerns expressed by Members on some major issues are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Designated schools

5. According to the Administration, the objective of setting up designated schools is to facilitate these schools to develop strategies and accumulate experience in supporting the teaching and learning of NCS students and to share their experience with other schools which have also admitted NCS students through an established network organized by EDB, thereby benefitting all NCS students in local schools. There were

30 designated schools in the 2011-2012 school year. Designated schools are provided with an annual special grant ranging from \$300,000 to \$600,000 depending on the number of NCS students admitted by the respective designated schools. Under the current system, NCS children can choose to study in designated schools where there is a greater proportion of NCS students or in mainstream schools where the majority of the students are Chinese speaking.

6. During past discussion, Panel members were concerned that while a special grant was available to designated schools, non-designated schools admitting NCS students were not provided with any specific subsidy for assisting NCS students. They were also concerned about how designated schools used the special grant.

7. The Administration advised that all schools admitting NCS students were provided with resources which included grants for remedial teaching, Capacity Enhancement Grant and Student Guidance Service Grant. In addition, schools with intake of newly-arrived NCS students were provided with the School-based Support Scheme Grant to run school-based programmes for NCS students. Regarding the use of the special grant by designated schools, the Administration advised that individual schools had deployed the grant according to their specific needs, which included the employment of teaching assistants and the development of school-based teaching and learning materials for dissemination to other schools.

8. At the meeting held on 12 December 2011, members were briefed on the EOC Report. Members noted EOC's view that designated schools were not conducive to integration and effective learning of the Chinese language by NCS students as the local language environment was lacking. Although NCS students could choose between designated schools and mainstream schools, many of them had no alternative but to enroll in designated schools since they could not cope with the mainstream education system due to the absence of adequate and appropriate language support. Members were gravely concerned that as stated in the EOC Report, there was a view that pursuant to section 4(3) of the Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 602) ("RDO"), the policy of giving the choice of designated schools might in itself be discriminatory because it reinforced segregation. EOC considered that EDB should review the policy on designated schools.

9. According to EDB, it had abided by RDO to ensure that NCS students had equal opportunities in education. It was apparent to EDB

that some stakeholders supported the policy on designated schools to facilitate the provision of focused support for NCS students while some others considered that NCS students should be encouraged to study in mainstream schools to facilitate integration into the community. As further explained by EDB to the Panel, the provision of designated schools was so considered in the light of parental choice and the well-being of some NCS students. Moreover, the role of designated schools in supporting NCS students through the development of school-based teaching and learning materials and sharing of experiences with other schools should be recognized.

An alternative Chinese Language curriculum and qualification

10. There is currently one Chinese Language curriculum for all learners, irrespective of whether or not they are native Chinese speakers. As reflected by many deputations, NCS students were usually capable of communicating fluently in Chinese verbally, but encountered considerable difficulties in reading and writing Chinese. The Panel had pursued with the Administration the proposal of developing an alternative Chinese curriculum and related assessment for NCS students. For example, at the Panel meeting held on 12 November 2012, some members referred to the Chief Executive ("CE")'s pledge in his Manifesto for the CE election to develop the "Chinese as a Second Language" curriculum and assessment. They urged for early action on the part of the Administration to honour CE's pledge. There was also a suggestion that EDB might make reference to the Chinese curriculum and teaching materials used by local international schools. Similar concern about the proposal for an alternative curriculum was raised by some Members at the special meeting of FC on 12 April 2013.

11. The Administration had reservation on the proposal, and advised that in practice, individual schools admitting NCS students could adapt the Chinese Language curriculum to suit their specific needs and circumstances with reference to the Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for NCS Students ("Supplementary Guide") issued by EDB in 2008. The Supplementary Guide included four curriculum modes¹ leading to multiple pathways to cater for the diverse needs and aspirations of NCS students and to support their learning of the Chinese language at different stages of development. According to the Administration, the strategy of providing multiple curriculum modes under a common curriculum framework was based on local pedagogical

¹ The four curriculum modes are "immersion in Chinese Language lessons", "bridging/transition", "specific learning purposes" and "integration".

practices and overseas experience. Research findings also suggested that given support and empowerment, NCS students could learn and achieve results on par with local students. The Administration was of the view that an alternative Chinese Language curriculum with pre-set simpler contents and lower standards would limit the range of learning opportunities for NCS students with different needs and aspirations. Besides, due to the relatively small number of NCS students, the credibility and acceptance of the qualification attained under an alternative curriculum might be questionable.

12. Some members expressed grave concern that without an alternative curriculum and assessment, NCS students would be placed in a disadvantaged position when taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination together with their local counterparts. In this regard, the Administration explained that NCS students were encouraged to sit for internationally recognized Chinese Language examinations, such as the General Certificate of Secondary Education ("GCSE"), the International General Certificate of Secondary Education, the General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary-Level and Advanced-Level Examinations. To enhance support in this regard, the approval of FC had been sought to extend the ambit of the Examination Fee Remission Scheme² to cover these non-local Chinese Language examinations and to raise the subsidies for examination fees for NCS students³.

13. Regarding non-local qualifications such as the attainment in Chinese Language in the GCSE Examination, the Panel noted from the EOC Report that although the attainment was accepted as an alternative Chinese Language qualification for the purpose of satisfying the basic entrance requirements of local post-secondary education institutions, the gap between this qualification and the mainstream Chinese language qualification is so big that it could hardly satisfy the vocational requirements of NCS students. As suggested by EOC, the Administration should consider developing a Chinese Proficiency Programme and Testing System with curriculum taught in stages, graded assessment and accreditation. Reference could also be made to the globally recognized International English Language Testing System ("IELTS"). Some Panel members concurred that a Chinese language proficiency test with different levels should be put in place to enable NCS students to obtain

² The Examination Fee Remission Scheme is administered by the Student Financial Assistance Agency.

³ The latest improvements to the Examination Fee Remission Scheme for needy NCS students were approved by FC on 7 December 2012. See FCR(2012-13)55.

the qualifications in stages.

Other language support measures

14. Members stressed the importance for the Administration to formulate a long-term plan to facilitate the learning of Chinese by NCS students, as proficiency in Chinese had a great impact on the students' academic attainment. Their low attainment in Chinese might also be a major impediment to their academic or vocational pursuit. It was also noted that as stated in the EOC Report, without adequate support but having to meet the same requirements as set out in public examinations, EM students always lagged behind. EOC also pointed out the strong need for early language support for NCS children.

15. At the Panel meeting held on 12 December 2011, members generally agreed with EOC's view on the importance of strengthening Chinese language support to EM children at the pre-primary level. Some members considered that the existing six-month support programme provided to NCS children before enrolling in schools including kindergartens was insufficient. Instead, the Administration should commit to providing structured Chinese language support for NCS children at pre-primary level to help them lay a solid language foundation for learning Chinese and to ease their language difficulty when integrating into mainstream primary schools. Besides, some members asked the Administration to seriously consider engaging EM teachers who were proficient in minority languages to serve in kindergartens admitting EM children to help them adapt and integrate more effectively into mainstream schools.

16. In responding to members' concerns, the Administration explained its view that teaching assistants with EM background could be engaged by designated schools using the recurrent special grant; or in connection with the three-year pilot project of After-school Extended Chinese Learning under which non-designated schools might seek funding to put in place relevant programmes. In addition, kindergartens were invited annually to apply for school-based professional support services with a view to helping teachers design teaching and learning activities to tie in with the integrated approach adopted to facilitate children to learn languages in an authentic environment. EDB also organized professional development programmes for kindergarten teachers on designing appropriate learning activities to build up a foundation in Chinese language among NCS children.

17. Members welcomed EDB's announcement in the context of the 2013-2014 Budget that starting from the 2013-2014 financial year, an additional provision of \$2 million would be allocated each year to refine the Summer Bridging programme for NCS students progressing to Primary 1 to Primary 4 by allowing NCS parents to accompany their children during the Programme. There was a suggestion to further increase the funding so that more NCS parents could take part.

Latest position

18. The Administration had undertaken a comprehensive review on the education support measures provided to NCS students, and would report the outcome of the review to the Panel in mid-2013.

Relevant papers

19. A list of relevant papers is at **Appendix III**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 July 2013

Education for Ethnic Minorities Children**Meeting of Legislative Council****Panel on Education on 12 December 2011****--Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission--****Purpose**

This paper aims to update Members the views of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on education for ethnic minorities (EM) children. In the context of EOC's concern, ethnic minorities in this paper refer largely to South Asians, essentially Filipino, Indonesian, Nepalese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Thai, Sri-Lankan, Vietnamese etc. who are residing in Hong Kong, and who are from low income families which cannot afford the choice of international schools.

Background

2. Education is the key to the future of our children. Equal access to quality education provides children with a level-playing field in the education system and eventually in the employment market. EOC recognizes that education is an effective means of empowerment, and is fundamental to personal, social and career development of individuals. Concerned with the high failure rate of EM children in the mainstream education system, a Working Group on EM Education was set up in July 2010 to specifically deal with the subject.

3. The Working Group has met with different stakeholders including school principals and teachers, EM parents and students, and NGOs serving the EM community to ascertain their concerns and views on the subject. While the views of different stakeholders are diverse, probably because of their different personal experiences and perspectives, there are common concerns of which

learning Chinese language is seen to be most daunting. The majority of them considered that although language and other support programmes were funded, the outcome was disappointing. There was neither central monitoring of the support programmes' effectiveness nor quality assurance. The bulk of the EM students failed to attain the mainstream Chinese qualification in the end. What is worse is that most of them gave up mid-stream because their poor examination results in Chinese Language dragged down their overall academic attainment which in turn frustrated their aspiration to move up the academic ladder.

4. After working for nearly a year, the Working Group has come up with a set of recommendations in a Report published in July 2011 (copy attached). The Report attracted public attention and generated considerable discussions among the stakeholders as well as in public platforms. Nevertheless, the response of Education Bureau (EDB) has been disappointing. It failed to recognize the problems faced by EM students and only made vague and non-committal response to the Report's recommendations.

Key Recommendations

5. While it may not be practicable to have all the recommendations implemented at one go, the EOC and stakeholders consider that the recommendations on strengthening pre-primary/junior primary language support, developing an alternative curriculum/qualification assessment, and capturing relevant information for policy formulation and improvement of support measures should be accorded top priority.

Language Support at Pre-primary/Junior Primary Level

6. It is universally recognized by educationists and linguists that students tend to be much more receptive to and be capable of learning a foreign language at younger age. With the introduction of the Pre-primary Education Voucher

Scheme, there is an increasing number of EM children enrolled in kindergartens taught with mainstream curriculum where Chinese is predominately the medium of instruction. The EOC recommends in the Report that the Government should commit to providing Chinese language support programme for EM children at pre-primary level to help them lay a solid language foundation for learning Chinese and to lessen their language difficulty in their integration in the mainstream primary schools. A useful reference is that, a charitable organization, the Lee Hysan Foundation, has been funding a pilot scheme to hire students of the Hong Kong Institute of Education and retired teachers to provide Chinese language support to EM children at about 30 kindergartens and primary schools (for junior primary level). Children who are covered by the scheme have undoubtedly benefited by the early intervention. We strongly urge the Government to learn from the experience and to seriously consider providing structured language support programmes for EM children at the pre-primary level.

7. In addition to language support, it would also be helpful to have EM kindergarten teachers, who are proficient in minority languages and familiar with their cultures, serving in mainstream kindergartens to help EM children to adapt and integrate more effectively. EM teachers can also enhance communications between the kindergartens/schools and parents who may not be proficient in Chinese or English. In this respect, the Government should, by making reference to the JUPAS, explore with the training institutes concerned to admit more EM students for training as kindergarten teachers, with a more flexible Chinese language admission standard.

Alternative Chinese Curriculum and Qualification

8. It is commonly agreed that the gap between GCSE (Chinese) and the mainstream Chinese curriculum/qualification is huge. Attainment of the GCSE Chinese qualification hardly helps school leavers to meet the vocational requirements. Despite the fact that starting from 2008/09, local universities

could exercise discretion to admit EM applicants vide JUPAS by accepting GCSE as an alternative Chinese language requirement, there is no noticeable increase in the percentage of EM students getting a place in tertiary institutions. The reasons could be either the universities seldom exercise their discretion, or EM students, frustrated by their low attainment in Chinese language, generally perform unsatisfactorily in other subjects that hinder their academic advancement. So far, relaxing the admission requirement on Chinese language could hardly be considered an effective measure in enhancing EM students' academic pursuit.

9. EOC advocates a more pragmatic approach: to develop a dedicated Chinese Proficiency Programme and Testing System (CPPTS) with curriculum taught in stages, graded assessment and accreditation. Unlike an alternative syllabus/academic curriculum which is categorically dismissed by the EDB as a 'second-class' qualification, the CPPTS aims to provide an alternative language qualification for educational advancement as well as a benchmark for language proficiency required by different trades and job groups. Reference could be made to the globally recognized International English Testing System (commonly known as IELTS). Adaptation could also be made to the Chinese Proficiency Test (HKS) (*Han yu Shui ping Kao shi*) administered by the China National Committee for Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) (CNCCPT). This alternative offers a set of more specific and achievable qualifications than the EDB's present policy which is either too high to be achievable by most or too low as to be meaningless. It also offers a range of language attainment standards to suit the different abilities of EM children who may have widely varying language backgrounds.

Data Collection

10. In the course of following up the Report, the EOC has tried to capture statistics and information about the educational attainment of EM students with particular reference to their attendance in tertiary education. To our

disappointment, there is no uniform and systematic mechanism among the tertiary institutions in collecting information about students' ethnicities, modes of their secondary education, main language spoken etc. The University Grants Committee Secretariat provides statistics about students studying in the government-funded programmes, but categorization is essentially by local/non-local students, or Chinese speaking/non-Chinese speaking. Further enquiry with the tertiary institutions reveals that the interpretation of 'ethnicities' vary among institutes when they capture students' profile differently, including 'nationalities', 'place of origin', 'place of birth' and 'language spoken at home'. Apart from the tertiary level, there is no accurate statistics and information about the dropout rate of EM students at each level of studies in the primary and secondary education. One can only deduce from the statistics on student population by 'ethnicities' (the definition of which was unclear) at different level of studies/age groups. The latest available information was the 2006 Population By-census which was seriously out-dated.

11. In the absence of accurate data and information collected via a systematic, methodical and uniform mechanism, it is doubtful how policymakers could make out the scope and intensity of the issue, and to formulate effective policies and measures for improvement. In this respect, the Government should develop an effective data collection system to capture the relevant information. The Report also recommends that the Government should undertake comprehensive longitudinal study to keep track of the academic and social development of EM students in order to identify policy deficiencies and service gaps for devising appropriate and effective support measures.

Way Forward

12. Education is a major undertaking. For many EM families, their children's access to quality and higher education remains their only effective hope to rise above poverty in time. The EOC is prepared to collaborate with the Government and stakeholders in enhancing equal opportunities of EM

students to enjoy quality education. We await anxiously, like the EM communities and other concerned stakeholders, positive and solid response from EDB in respect of the problems identified and the recommendations made in our Report.

Equal Opportunities Commission
December 2011

Motion on
“Reviewing the education policy for ethnic minority students”
moved by Hon Abraham SHEK
at the Council meeting of 8 February 2012

Motion as amended by Hon Tanya CHAN and Hon Starry LEE

That education is the key to success and the future of our next generation; while the Equal Opportunities Commission (‘EOC’) already published ‘Education for all: the Report on the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities’ (‘the Report’) in July 2011, highlighting how the mainstream education system has let down ethnic minority students who are mostly from low-income families and putting forward various recommendations to the Government on addressing their learning needs, the Government has not yet proposed any concrete measures on following up the implementation of the EOC’s recommendations in the Report and offered any additional support to the 14 000 ethnic minority students in Hong Kong; in this connection, this Council urges the Government to review its education policy for ethnic minority students, so as to address their concerns, particularly the admission and assessment procedures of schools, the available choices of designated schools and mainstream schools, learning support for pre-primary ethnic minority students and provision of an alternative Chinese Curriculum and Qualification, so that ethnic minority students can enjoy equal access to quality education, which is pivotal not only to such students’ pursuit of further education and employment, but also to Hong Kong maintaining its competitiveness; the relevant initiatives should include:

- (a) implementing a separate Chinese curriculum assessment scheme especially for ethnic minority students to help them meet the requirements of further education and vocational training;
- (b) providing pre-primary educational institutions with additional resources and relevant support to encourage the admission of ethnic minority students;
- (c) enhancing the training for teachers who teach Chinese as a second or foreign language;
- (d) designing suitable assessment schemes for adoption by schools to facilitate early identification of ethnic minority students’ special needs, so that they can receive appropriate education;
- (e) launching a study to monitor the learning progress of ethnic minority students to enable the Government to review their needs and the effectiveness of their education, and establishing a database for systemic

data collection and analysis, so as to facilitate the formulation of an education policy and the provision of support which meet the needs of ethnic minority students;

- (f) increasing intake quotas, providing a positive learning environment and adequate support to meet the demand of ethnic minority students with special educational needs;
- (g) enhancing the career guidance and vocational training services for ethnic minority graduates; and
- (h) enhancing public awareness of the importance of cultural diversities and ethnic integration, so as to create a better learning environment for ethnic minority students; and
- (i) developing teaching materials and providing parental education.

Appendix III

Relevant papers on education support for non-Chinese speaking students

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Education	12.12.2011 (Item VII)	CB(2)486/11-12(07) CB(2)486/11-12(08) CB(2)552/11-12(01) Minutes CB(2)590/11-12(01) CB(2)773/11-12(01) Report on the Equal Opportunities Commission's Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities
Legislative Council	8.2.2012	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 235 – 247 and 261 – 302 Progress Report on Members' motion on "Reviewing the education policy for ethnic minority students" provided by the Administration
Panel on Education	12.11.2012 (Item IV)	CB(4)111/12-13(03) Minutes
Finance Committee	7.12.2012 (Item No.3)	FCR(2012-13)55 Minutes
Finance Committee	12.4.2013	Administration's replies to members' initial written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014 (Reply serial number: EDB212)

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 July 2013