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Panel on Education

Meeting on 8 June 2014

Background brief on issues related to enhancing Chinese learning and teaching for non-Chinese speaking students

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Members on issues related to enhancing Chinese learning and teaching for non-Chinese speaking ("NCS") students.

Background

Funding support for schools

2. Under the current arrangements, NCS students, like their local counterparts, may choose to enrol in any public sector primary and secondary school through the school places allocation systems. Starting from the 2013-2014 school year, the Administration abolished the so-called "designated schools" system¹ as it might have given rise to certain labelling effect. Instead, all schools admitting 10 or more NCS students were provided with an additional recurrent funding ranging from \$300,000 to \$600,000 per annum. Schools could flexibly deploy the resources to support their NCS students. With effect from the 2014-2015 school year, the funding has been improved as follows –

¹ Before the 2013-2014 school year, the Administration had provided an additional recurrent grant to some schools which traditionally admitted a higher proportion of NCS students to facilitate their implementation of school-based support measures to cater for their NCS students. These schools were generally referred to as "designated schools".

<u>Number of NCS students admitted by the school</u>	<u>Additional recurrent funding (\$million)</u>
10 – 25	0.80
26 – 50	0.95
51 – 75	1.10
76 – 90	1.25
91 or more	1.50

3. The estimated expenditure for providing this funding support was \$197.7 million and \$210 million for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school year respectively². According to the Administration, the Project of After-school Extended Chinese Learning for NCS Students funded by the Language Fund has also been regularized and subsumed in the additional recurrent funding for eligible schools from the 2014-2015 school year onwards.

Learning and teaching of Chinese Language

4. In 2008, the Education Bureau ("EDB") issued the Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for Non-Chinese Speaking Students ("Supplementary Guide") which provides, amongst others, guidance to teachers in tackling the difficulties of second-language learners in learning Chinese. Two full sets of learning and teaching materials in the form of textbooks, covering primary to secondary levels, were developed and distributed to schools and NCS students in 2009 and 2010 respectively.

5. The Supplementary Guide recommends four curriculum modes of "immersion in Chinese Language lessons", "bridging/transition", "specific learning purposes" and "integration" 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. The Panel on Education ("the Panel") noted in July 2013 that EDB was considering the development of a more systematic Chinese Language curriculum framework with learning objectives alongside the packaged learning and teaching materials pegged to the Supplementary Guide.

6. Subsequently, it was announced in the 2014 Policy Address that starting from the 2014-2015 school year, the Government would

² See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. EDB123 in the Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2015-16.

implement a Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework ("Learning Framework") with supporting learning and teaching materials as well as assessment tools for ethnic minority ("EM") students in primary and secondary schools. Developed from the perspective of second language learners, the Learning Framework provides a systematic set of objectives and expected learning outcomes that describes the learning progress of NCS students at different learning stages. Teachers may set progressive learning targets, learning progress and expected learning outcomes using a "small-step" learning approach to enhance the learning effectiveness of NCS students.

7. On professional development programmes for school leaders and teachers, starting from the 2014-2015 school year, sustained and progressively advanced professional development programmes are organized regularly. The EDB has also launched a Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) funded under the Language Fund on a pilot basis³. In addition, EDB provides school-based professional support and in-service professional development programmes to enhance the professional capability of schools and teachers in teaching Chinese as a second language. Meanwhile, starting from the 2014-2015 school year, EDB has introduced in phases an Applied Learning (Chinese Language) ("ApL(C)") subject for EM students at senior secondary levels, to be pegged at Levels 1 to 3 of the Qualifications Framework ("QF") as an alternative qualification.

8. In May 2014, the Working Group on "Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework" ("the Working Group") was set up under the Curriculum Development Council Committee on Chinese Language Education. The Working Group is tasked to advise EDB on the development of the Learning Framework and the supporting materials that aim to help NCS students to learn the Chinese Language more effectively.

Deliberations on major issues of concern

9. The subject of education support for NCS students, in particular the learning and teaching of Chinese Language, has received ongoing attention by the Panel. Some concern groups have also written to the Panel stating their views on the need to enhance support for the learning

³ See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial No. EDB169 in the Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2015-16.

and teaching of Chinese Language for NCS students⁴. On other occasions such as the recent examination of the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-16, Members also raised questions on relevant issues. The major views and concerns expressed by Members since commencement of the Fifth Legislative Council are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Alternative Chinese Language curriculum

10. As observed by Panel members, many NCS students could communicate fluently in Chinese verbally, but had considerable difficulties in reading and writing Chinese. The Panel noted that according to the report published in July 2011 by the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities set up under the Equal Opportunities Commission, there were common concerns of which learning Chinese language was seen to be the most daunting.

11. Some Panel members urged EDB to take early action to honour the incumbent Chief Executive ("CE")'s pledge in his Election Manifesto to develop a "Chinese as a Second Language" curriculum and assessment. Some members considered an alternative Chinese Language curriculum necessary for NCS students, especially those who did not have an early start in learning Chinese. EDB was also asked to make reference to the Chinese curriculum and teaching materials used by local international schools.

12. According to EDB, research findings had suggested that with support and empowerment, NCS students could learn and achieve results on par with their local counterparts. It considered 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. Due to the relatively small number of NCS students, the recognition and acceptance of the qualification attained under an alternative Chinese curriculum might also be questionable.

13. Some members expressed grave concern that NCS students would be placed in a disadvantaged position when taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education ("HKDSE") Examination alongside their local counterparts. In this regard, the Administration explained that NCS students could sit for internationally recognized Chinese Language examinations, such as the General Certificate of Secondary Education,

⁴ Some examples are the submission from Oxfam Hong Kong [LC Paper No. CB(4)558/13-14(01)] and the submission from Hong Kong Unison Limited [LC Paper No. CB(4)934/13-14(01)].

the International General Certificate of Secondary Education, the General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary-Level and Advanced-Level Examinations.

14. At its meeting held on 9 July 2013, the Panel passed a motion urging the authorities to face up to the difficulties encountered by NCS students in learning Chinese and actively consider formulating as soon as possible a "Chinese as a Second Language" curriculum and assessment criteria for implementation in primary and secondary schools.

15. In its written response, EDB referred to the Learning Framework as a means to step up support for NCS students' learning of Chinese as a second language. Premised on having no alternative Chinese Language curriculum and public examination with pre-set simpler contents and lower standards, EDB considered that the Learning Framework applicable in the learning and teaching of Chinese at school was a learning "Chinese as a Second Language" curriculum.

The Learning Framework

16. In deliberating on the Learning Framework at the Panel meetings on 14 April and 16 July 2014, some members sought explanation on how the Learning Framework differed from the Chinese Language curriculum adopted by international schools in Hong Kong or from a second language curriculum typically implemented in other jurisdictions. According to EDB, the latter categories of curriculum were more functionally or practically oriented, focusing mainly on oral communication. Very often, students were taught the second language in their mother tongue. The Learning Framework however aimed at facilitating NCS students to bridge over to mainstream Chinese Language classes and sit for the HKDSE Examination in Chinese Language.

17. Noting that NCS students would benefit from early exposure to, and learning of, Chinese in daily life and at school, some members suggested that the Learning Framework should be extended to pre-primary education. As explained by EDB, the Learning Framework had been developed for public sector primary and secondary schools to address concerns about NCS students' learning of Chinese as a second language; while the Quality Education Fund had funded studies to help NCS students learn Chinese in kindergartens.

Issues related to the ApL(C) subject

18. There were concerns about the recognition of the attainment in ApL(C) in the HKDSE Examination. In response, EDB advised that the development of the Learning Framework and the introduction of the ApL(C) subject would enable NCS students to obtain a qualification in Chinese for further studies and/or employment. EDB was actively seeking recognition of the qualification from stakeholders, including post-secondary institutions, the Civil Service Bureau and employers. The Working Group would also maintain close communication with employers.

19. Some members opined that given the diverse cultural and family background of NCS students, they could not be expected to attain a level of Chinese proficiency comparable to that of local students. There was a suggestion that consideration should be given to implementing an arrangement similar to the past Syllabus A and Syllabus B in English Language of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination ("HKCEE"), which had enabled students to be examined under the relevant Syllabus according to their language abilities. The Administration advised that according to the past experience of the English Language examination of HKCEE, the qualification of an alternative curriculum and assessment did not receive wide recognition.

20. The allocation of resources for implementing the ApL(C) subject was an issue of concern raised by some Members when examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-16. As informed by EDB, starting from the 2014-2015 school year, a new Student Grant for Applied Learning Chinese (for non-Chinese speaking students) has been introduced to fully subsidize schools for offering ApL(C) to their students. The estimated expenditure for the 2014-2015 school year was about \$2 million. Similar to other ApL courses, review and evaluation will be conducted after the first cohort of students have completed their courses in 2017, covering aspects such as students' participation, learning, performance and articulation pathway(s). Continuous updating and refinement will also be made from time to time according to students' learning needs⁵.

Related support measures

21. Members stressed the importance for the Administration to formulate a long-term plan to facilitate the learning of Chinese by NCS

⁵ See Controlling Officer's Reply Serial Nos. EDB016 and EDB180 in the Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2015-16

students, and considered that these students' low attainment in Chinese might be a major impediment to their academic or vocational pursuit. Some members were of the view that the Administration should focus effort on assisting NCS students to acquire basic Chinese Language skills to enhance their employability. In this regard, the Administration referred to the pilot scheme on Workplace Chinese Language Programme for NCS students launched since the 2011-2012 school year, which was pegged at Levels 1 to 3 of QF.

22. On the provision of the additional recurrent grant to schools, concern was raised that schools which had admitted less than 10 NCS students would not be entitled to such funding support. In response, the Administration advised that for schools admitting only a handful of NCS students, most NCS students could benefit from the immersed Chinese language environment in these schools.

23. Regarding concerns about the language environment in schools, the importance of parents' participation and NCS students' early exposure to an immersed Chinese language environment, EDB informed members that starting from the summer of 2013, the Summer Bridging Programme for NCS students had been refined. Henceforth, NCS students entering Primary 1, as well as those progressing to Primary 2, 3 and 4 could take part in the Programme and their parents could accompany their children. NCS parents and their children were also encouraged to take part in diversified activities at the community level to enhance their exposure to and use of Chinese.

Latest developments

24. The Administration will update the Panel on the progress of enhancing the learning and teaching of Chinese for NCS students at the meeting to be held on 8 June 2015.

Relevant papers

25. A list of relevant papers is in the **Appendix**.

Appendix

Relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
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
Panel on Education	9.7.2013 (Item IV)	CB(4)852/12-13(05) Minutes
Panel on Education	27.1.2014 (Item I)	CB(4)323/13-14(01)
Legislative Council	19.3.2014	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 118 – 125 (Question 20)
Panel on Education	14.4.2014 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes CB(4)558/13-14(01)
Panel on Education	16.7.2014 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes CB(4)934/13-14(01) (English version only) CB(4)804/14-15(01)
Finance Committee	1.4.2015	Administration's replies to members' initial written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 (Reply serial numbers: EDB016, EDB123, EDB169 and EDB180)