



# Hong Kong Unison Limited

## 香港融樂會有限公司

For discussion on 14 November, 2016

Panel on Education

### **Issues concerning the support of ethnic minority children under Free Quality Kindergarten Education**

Hong Kong Unison (hereinafter 'Unison') is a non-government organization that serves ethnic minority residents in Hong Kong. We aim at eliminating all forms of racial discrimination in Hong Kong through policy advocacy, and we focus on fighting for equal rights to education for ethnic minority children.

#### **Purpose**

1. As the Panel on Education will discuss the 'Latest Development in Migration to Free Quality Kindergarten Education' under agenda IV in the meeting on 14 November, we would like to submit our views related to the support of ethnic minority children under the Free Quality Kindergarten Education for the discussion during the meeting.

#### **Latest Development**

##### Curriculum Development

2. The Curriculum Development Council (CDC) conducted a review of the 'Guide to Pre-Primary Curriculum' (2006), and Unison has submitted our feedback to the Education Bureau ('EDB') on September, 2016 as attached. Unison particularly concerns on concrete guidance to kindergartens on (a) '*Home-school cooperation*' to facilitate involvement and communication between non-Chinese speaking (NCS) parents and school, (b) '*Catering for the diversity of children*' for an effective language learning and inclusion in an integrated environment in which Chinese and NCS children are in the same class, (c) '*Self and Society*' for all children to understand multi-cultural aspects and self-identity in the Hong Kong society, and (d) '*Transition from KG to Primary school*' to ensure NCS children acquire basic Chinese proficiency so they transition to mainstream primary schools which use Chinese as the teaching medium. We hope the CDC consider Unison's suggestions to provide effective kindergarten learning for children from all racial background.

##### Quality Assurance Framework

3. The transparency and effectiveness of the Quality Review (QR) is important as mentioned in paragraph 4 of the LegCo document LC Paper No. CB(4)79/16-17(03). However,



the current QR reports uploaded to the EDB website are only available in Chinese<sup>1</sup>. Unison urges the EDB to upload reports in English to ensure equal access of information to NCS parents, so that they can also benefit from the ‘transparency and facilitate parents in their choice of KGs’ as stated in the website<sup>2</sup>.

4. The refined Performance Indicators (PIs) should include parameters to assess the level of integration among students from different ethnic backgrounds, and monitor and track the progress of NCS students. Such information is crucial to support the public accountability of an equitable free quality kindergarten education.

#### Additional Grant to Support Learning of NCS Students

5. As an additional grant<sup>3</sup> shall be provided to kindergartens admitting 8 or more NCS children, there should be a transparent monitoring system to evaluate the assistance and support services administered with the grant to ensure effective use of additional resources and fulfill the accountability of use of public money.

6. To further enhance and facilitate informed school choice, Unison urges the EDB to develop a mechanism in which stakeholders such as parents can find out the kind of learning supports (with or without the additional grant) for NCS students in different kindergartens.

#### Student Admission

7. The ‘Guidelines to kindergartens on admission arrangement<sup>4</sup>’ state that English version of application forms and admission guidelines be available, and special arrangement for NCS parents at Chinese interviews be allowed, including the use of interpretation and/or translation service or allowing parents to be accompanied by a Chinese speaking relative/friend during the interview. In order to monitor the compliance of the kindergarten on such practices, the EDB should keep track of the numbers of the related service being used as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> EDB website on Quality Review Mechanism (Chinese version only) - <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/quality-assurance-framework/qr/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> EDB website on Quality Review Mechanism (FAQ - Question 2)- <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/quality-assurance-framework/qr/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Legislative Council Panel on Education – Policy on Kindergarten Education  
Paper No. CB(4)542/15-16(01), Paragraph 37

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/kindergarten-k1-admission-arrangements/2017\\_Admission%20Guideline\\_TC.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/tc/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/kindergarten-k1-admission-arrangements/2017_Admission%20Guideline_TC.pdf)



8. The EDB mentioned to continue promoting parents education in understanding the children's developmental needs and parents' engagement in children learning<sup>5</sup>. Regarding the EDB talks organized in the past years, Unison observed that the attendance of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) parents was disappointingly low (even the talks with simultaneous interpretation services). The EDB should also *report to the LegCo and the public by informing promotional strategies and the number of attendance of NCS parents in the talks* which use English or provide interpretation services, so as to monitor the reach and effectiveness of these talks for NCS parents.

### **Conclusion**

9. When migrating to Free Quality Kindergarten Education, Unison urges the EDB to cater for the diverse needs of non-Chinese speaking children, so as to ensure children from all racial background can enjoy equal and equitable early childhood education opportunities, and enable functioning and integration into Hong Kong with equal and full access to further education.

---

<sup>5</sup> Legislative Council Panel on Education, Migration to Free Quality Kindergarten Education. LC Paper No. CB(4)79/16-17(03), paragraph 8.



**Hong Kong Unison's Submission to the Review of  
'Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum' (2006)**

**30 September, 2016**

1. Hong Kong Unison ("Unison") welcomes the review of the 'Guide to Pre-primary Curriculum' (2006) in anticipation for the Free Quality Kindergarten Policy in year 2017-2018. Kindergarten (KG) is the first step for Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) children to learn Chinese and receive formal education. It is important that the Review provides concrete recommendations and sufficient guidelines for kindergartens to cater children and parents from different ethnicity backgrounds and whose mother tongue are not Cantonese.
2. Unison takes this opportunity to highlight our suggestions on some of the key emphases of the Review as follows.

**Home-school cooperation**

In response to the points in the *Executive Summary (Draft for Discussion)*:  
4.2.2.4, 4.4.5.14, 4.6.2.3, 4.7.2.3, 5.5.1

3. Home school cooperation is very important since it allows parents to understand child's development and performance in schools. Currently ethnic minority parents find it difficult to talk to and understand the school due to language barrier; according to parents' experiences, the majority of kindergarten teachers are not able/ willing/ comfortable to speak in English.

***Chinese kindergartens refer to the MOI but should not define the communication language***

4. Education Bureau ("EDB") should remind KGs that 'Chinese Kindergarten' refers to the medium of instruction of the school (i.e. adapting a local curriculum as required under the Free Quality Education Scheme); it does not mean the school only uses Chinese to communicate with parents, as experienced by many ethnic minority parents when they approached Chinese kindergartens.

***Measure to foster parent-school communications***

5. Hong Kong is a world city where Chinese and English are the official languages. Unison suggests that there should be bilingual notices/ students' handbooks for parents who do not read Chinese, so that they can comprehend the messages disseminated from schools. Measures such as grouping parents after schools to explain to them verbally in simple English, or marking notes on the notices in English should be encouraged in order to facilitate parents' understanding on the messages from schools. The use of interpretation



services (like phone, escort etc.) should be introduced and encouraged for both school and parents to ensure the accuracy of communications.

6. Informal ways like using phone communication applications for groups between teacher and parents, or even between Chinese and non-Chinese parents can be encouraged to build up supportive network within schools.

***Schools mechanism and policies for effective communication with parents should be listed in the kindergarten profile***

7. As stated in 4.6.2.3, 'Schools should have policies and mechanisms in place and maintain effective communication with parents ... as well as render comprehensive and appropriate support to children.' Whichever supportive measures the schools adopt, these mechanisms and policies for effective communication with NCS parents should be transparent and listed in the kindergarten profile to facilitate parents' choice of kindergarten for their kids.

***Hiring of ethnic minority school staff***

8. Parents appreciate if the school has ethnic minority teacher assistant ("TA"), whom they can communicate with in their home language. However, the communication duty should not be shifted only to the TA but also the class teacher, who interacts daily with the children. Standardized training for TAs should be made available to improve TAs' competence in taking care of young children and to perform their duty in kindergarten skillfully.

**Catering for the diversity of children**

In response to the point in the *Executive Summary (Draft for Discussion)*: 4.6

9. Children learn a new language easier when they are young, and communication at the age of 3 does not only rely on language but other non-verbal channels too. Thus putting Chinese and NCS students together in the same school and class does not only benefit NCS children in Chinese learning through interaction, but also benefit all children by fostering integration in the society since young (as stated in 4.6.2.4).

***NCS and Chinese students should be in the same class despite their mother tongue***

10. Currently some kindergartens put NCS children into separate classes with the intention that they learn better when the class is conducted in English. However, English is not their mother tongue either. This in fact sacrifices the chances of interaction between Chinese and NCS children. As mentioned in the <Points to ponder > of the *Executive Summary* 4.6, Unison welcomes the point 'Save in exceptional circumstances, forming groups by ethnicity or the languages used at home should be avoided'; however EDB should state what 'exceptional circumstances' are to avoid segregation in kindergartens. If schools adopt grouping in their routine, parents should be informed and explained.



***Learning goals of NCS students in Chinese language should be the same as Chinese children***

11. As stated in 4.6.2.1, teachers are ‘*advised to refine the curriculum, adjust the learning content to cater for individual needs, and devise effective support strategies according to the school context.*’ It is important to note that ‘refine’ does not mean to teach NCS children a lower level of Chinese, as reflected by many ethnic minority parents. It is important to address individual needs but also to ensure every child is learning and progressing. The learning goals and examples of learning expectations for Chinese and NCS students should be the same in Chinese learning area as stated in 4.4.5 (c).

***Foster inclusion environment in schools by staff training and parents education***

12. Responding to 4.6.2.4, schools are encouraged to ‘*foster a culture of inclusion ... which help them (children in early age) develop the values and attitudes of accepting and respecting others.*’ In order to foster a culture of inclusion, school staff themselves should first understand and accept cultural diversity. It is observed that most Chinese school staff are unfamiliar with ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. Unison suggests that certain percentage of school staff receive compulsory cultural sensitivity training so as to ‘*enhance professional capacity*’ as stated in 5.3.

13. As mentioned in the <Points to ponder> in 4.6, ‘*schools may promote parents education to help parents gain understanding of the vision of integrated education and the corresponding school measures.*’ Schools should encourage ethnic minority parents to join such sessions (with appropriate language support if needed) as this will enhance communication and understanding between Chinese and ethnic minority parents, help build support network, and promote integration in the long run.

***Set up sharing platform of the resources and support measures for teaching NCS children***

14. As stated in 4.6.2.5, schools are encouraged to make good use of community resources and support measures. Information sharing platform should be set up to gather social resources, including but not limited to the list of organizations which provide assistance and/or services to KGs, and the services and publications<sup>1</sup> of EDB KG School-based Support Team for easier reference for KGs.

---

<sup>1</sup> Details of the EDB KG School base support team and their publications - [http://cd1.edb.hkedcity.net/cd/sbsk/attachment/sharing-activities/JRE/JRE\\_EMCM.pdf](http://cd1.edb.hkedcity.net/cd/sbsk/attachment/sharing-activities/JRE/JRE_EMCM.pdf)



### **Language learning**

In response to the point in the Executive Summary (Draft for Discussion): 4.4.5

#### ***Build up Chinese language ability of NCS children***

15. Point 4.4.5.5 mentioned that *'Chinese is the medium of communication for most people in Hong Kong, and the language environment of the most kindergartens is mainly Chinese.'* However, Unison observed that the language environment of some kindergartens, especially those with many NCS children, is English, even when they adapt the local curriculum. The assumption that it is easier for NCS children to learn in an English environment is not accurate since English is not their mother tongue. EDB should give special remarks in the Curriculum Guide that NCS children are also **local** students who need to *'develop and grasp the basic skills of Chinese first'*. All children in kindergartens should receive equal education.

#### ***Importance of Chinese foundation for NCS children in their education pathway***

16. NCS children are in a disadvantaged and unfair position if they do not receive an equitable opportunity to develop Chinese skills at kindergarten. Many ethnic minority parents select primary school based on the Chinese ability their children acquired in kindergarten, especially when they know the medium of instruction in most mainstream schools is Chinese. It is not only the Chinese language subject, but all other subjects including mathematics and general studies etc. are taught in Cantonese. If Chinese abilities of non-Chinese students are poor, they are subjected to very limited choice of schools (only the so called 'EMI' schools). Their Chinese ability at K3 actually determines their whole education pathway in the long term.

#### ***EDB should incorporate measures to enhance the NCS Parents involvement in the language learning***

17. As shared in point 4.4.5.14, *'family plays an equally important role in facilitating children's language acquisition'*, and *'parents should have natural and pleasurable interaction with children in everyday life.'* Since ethnic minority parents may not acquire Chinese or good English skills, it is important that the new curriculum guide includes suggestions for family to help children's language learning at home. For example, teachers can read or record the passage to parents and ask them to write down the pronunciation in their own language. Parents hence will be able to read to their children, or at least check if children are pronouncing correctly.

18. Chinese classes for parents and children can be organized in kindergarten too (with the help of community resources if available) so that parents not only set up good examples for children on learning the language, but also enhance their Chinese skills.



### **Self and Society**

In response to the point in the Executive Summary (Draft for Discussion): 4.4.6

***The revised curriculum guide should remark that ‘Hong Kong is a multicultural city and not all residents are Chinese’***

19. It is stated in the 4.4.6.5 (b) point 3 that one of the learning expectations of children is ‘to have a basic understanding of the Chinese culture and their identity as Chinese’. While it is understandable for children to learn about local Chinese culture, the Curriculum Guide should make note that there are also local residents in Hong Kong who are non-Chinese by ethnicity.

***Recognize NCS children’s identity by using new terminology (e.g. Hong Kong Nepalese, Hong Kong Pakistani etc.)***

20. NCS parents shared that sometimes children find their identity confused. Although NCS children are born in Hong Kong and grow up here, because of their passport, skin color, or culture they are not classified as Chinese. Thus instead of rigidly define students as Nepalese, Pakistani, and Chinese, terms like ‘Hong Kong Nepalese’, ‘Hong Kong Pakistani’ etc. should be introduced to recognize their local identity and build up their sense of belonging.

***Introduce cultures and festivals of different ethnicities in Hong Kong to cultivate integration***

21. Taking the learning theme ‘Festivals’ as an example, to ‘deepen children’s understanding of traditional festivals as well as the cultures of China and other countries’ as stated in 4.4.6.5, festivals and cultures of different ethnicities in Hong Kong should also be introduced through interactive activities, so that children learn about different cultures of local residents in Hong Kong; this enhances integration in the society from a young age.

### **Transition from KG to P.1**

In response to the point in the Executive Summary (Draft for Discussion): 4.7

***Ensure basic Chinese ability of NCS children when they graduate from kindergarten***

22. Although ‘standardized criteria should not be used to assess children’s performance at the stage of early childhood’ as stated in point 7 (Glossary – Assessment) and point 4.7.1.5 mentioned ‘primary education is the start of learning by subject’, point 4.7.2.1 stated that children should be able to ‘possess good language awareness and learning attitude, especially in Chinese ... to prepare them well for using the language as the means of learning and communication in future.’ The question of how to facilitate and ensure NCS children acquire the basic skills needed for P.1 **without** exerting unnecessary pressure is what kindergartens and the EDB should focus on by working together with parents. Chinese





competency between Chinese and NCS children by K.3 should not be hugely different. Hence, the level of Chinese taught and learnt by NCS children should be explained to parents at the onset so they can monitor the learning progress of their child. Moreover, Chinese ability should be built and progressed throughout kindergarten and not only during Summer Bridging Programme<sup>2</sup>.

### **Monitoring of school in applying the curriculum**

23. Many of the perspectives suggested in the Executive Summary of the review of the Curriculum Guide are not new actually. For example, the importance of home-school cooperation has always been emphasized in the 2006 Guide, but still NCS parents find it difficult to communicate with schools. In this regard, the monitoring of kindergartens in implementing this curriculum is as important as how it is designed.
24. Instead of passively waiting for parents to report to the EDB about malpractices of kindergarten, the Bureau should take initiative to consult major stakeholders such as parents (including NCS parents), on their comments and feedback of the kindergarten during the quality review (QR) process.
25. The QR report should be available in English as well, so that non-Chinese parents can benefit from the *'transparency and facilitate parents in their choice of KGs'* as stated in the EDB website<sup>3</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

26. When assessing any proposed change to the 2006 Guide, Unison urges the EDB to cater for the diverse needs of non-Chinese speaking children, so as to ensure children from all racial background can enjoy equal and equitable early childhood education opportunities, and enable functioning and integration into Hong Kong with equal and full access to further education.

---

<sup>2</sup> Currently there is Summer Bridging Programme for NCS students and one of the aims is to facilitate NCS Primary 1 entrants' adaptation to classroom setting with the use of Chinese. However, since the programme is not compulsory, the duration is limited and there will only be NCS students in the class, the Chinese foundation of children should be enhanced through kindergarten instead when there are Chinese learning environment which children can pick up the language easier through daily interaction with other children who speak Cantonese.

Summer Bridging Programme for Non-Chinese Speaking Students: EDUCATION BUREAU CIRCULAR MEMORANDUM NO. 68/2016 - [http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/student-parents/ncs-students/support-to-school/SBP\\_2016\\_EDBCM\\_eng\\_final.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/student-parents/ncs-students/support-to-school/SBP_2016_EDBCM_eng_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> EDB website on Quality Review Mechanism - <http://www.edb.gov.hk/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/quality-assurance-framework/qr/index.html>