



Hong Kong Unison Limited

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Hong Kong Unison Submission to the Education Panel on Education issues of Ethnic Minority

Purpose

Hong Kong Unison ('Unison') is a local non-governmental 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 and equitable rights to education for ethnic minority children. Unison has been following up closely with concerned stakeholders including scholars, principals, teachers, ethnic minority parents and students, on the integration of ethnic minority students in mainstream schools, the teaching and learning of Chinese for ethnic minority children, and future prospects such as higher education and employment for ethnic minority secondary school leavers. Despite efforts made by the Government, Unison is concerned about the effectiveness of the support and funding for the learning and teaching of non-Chinese speaking ('NCS') students. Unison urges the Government to develop and implement comprehensive policies and procedures to enable Chinese language learners develop proficiency in Chinese that is necessary for success in school and society.

Curriculum for Chinese language learners

Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework

2. Although the Government started in September 2014 the implementation of the "Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework" (Learning Framework), the piecemeal initiatives cannot render this Learning Framework effective. The Learning Framework, developed from the "Chinese Language Curriculum Guide" based on a Chinese-as-mother-tongue perspective, lacks concrete guidelines for implementation. The Education Bureau (EDB) leaves the adaptation of the mainstream curriculum to school-based decisions without benchmarks and teaching targets. The Learning Framework does not set stage learning objectives (設定學習目標) and provides limited guidance on pedagogic principles and methods, and developing teaching materials. The Learning Framework and the support measures have failed to provide effectively sufficient support and appropriate efforts to improve the quality of Chinese language education for ethnic minority students, for whom Chinese is their second (or third) language.



Alternative Chinese Qualifications

3. Due to the lack of an effective Chinese curriculum for ethnic minority students, many are arranged to study for and take the GCSE (Chinese) examination that is equivalent to local primary two level upon graduation from secondary school. It is unfair and unreasonable for ethnic minority students who are born and raised in Hong Kong to spend 12 years in the local education system only to attain a level which even newly arrived NCS students can achieve in 2 years. This level of low Chinese proficiency adversely impact their employability and social mobility¹. Allowing students to sit for GCSE (Chinese) exams and use the results to apply for universities should be a short-term measure for non-new comers. To enable NCS students achieve a higher proficiency of Chinese, ‘the current framework should be further improvised to include curriculum, pedagogical, and assessment guidelines for teachers’ reference’.

Applied Learning Chinese (ApL(C))

4. In 2014, the Government announced two new 2-year applied learning Chinese ApL(C) courses with a focus on Chinese language in services and hospitality for secondary four students. Although results of the courses will be accepted by some tertiary education institutes as alternative Chinese qualification, this move limits Chinese learning of ethnic minority students to specific industries and does not equip them with inclusive Chinese capability.

5. It has been reported that the enrollment of NCS students in the ApL(C) classes is very low since teachers do not have the confidence on the quality of these courses; they are not run by regular Chinese subject secondary school teachers, but instructors from institutes which do not have experience teaching NCS students. ApL(C) is supposed to fill the gap level between GCE (AL) and DSE Chinese. However, whether the Chinese ability of these NCS students allow them to survive in the mainstream society remains to be seen.

6. The Education Bureau should report on the enrolment and attendance rate from 2014/15 to 2016/17 school year; and the level attained by the students in ApL(C) for accountability and suitability of the curriculum.

¹ Loh, EKY and Tam, LCW, *Struggling to Thrive: The Impact of Chinese Language Assessments on Social Mobility of Hong Kong Ethnic Minority Youth*, Asia-Pacific Education Researcher, 2016.



Professional development for teachers

7. Teachers and Chinese students in general do not understand the real meaning of racial equality, diversity, and human rights, hence ethnic minority students in mainstream schools often suffer from isolation and bullying. Besides enhancing systematic professional training for pre-service and in-service teachers on cultural and racial sensitivity of ethnic minorities of Hong Kong and teaching Chinese-as-a-second language, since ethnic minority students will become a norm in mainstream schools, Unison urges the Government to set a minimum requirement on the number teachers who are professionally trained to teach NCS students in all public schools.

8. The Government stated that there are ‘adequate training opportunities’ but the attendance and effectiveness of such trainings are in doubt. The EDB should inform the public on the effectiveness and attendance (i.e. the number of teachers and schools participated and the corresponding percentage based on the total number of schools with NCS students) of all professional development programmes (PDPs), topical seminars and workshops.

9. Scholars have commented that there is lack of professional capacity in teaching Chinese as a second language. The Government should also report on the funds spent, related programmes, and the number of teachers who benefitted from the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) under the Language Fund.

Monitoring the effectiveness of the Learning Framework

10. The EDB stated that the Learning Framework aimed at helping NCS students overcome the difficulties of learning Chinese with a view to enabling them to bridge over to mainstream Chinese Language classes. To date, the number of NCS students who have bridged over to mainstream classes has not been reported. Unison urges the EDB to present such information and collate data on the progress of NCS students under the Learning Framework, to determine the effectiveness of the Framework.

11. The EDB has commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) in 2014 to formulate the research framework to evaluate the effectiveness of support measures on the learning of Chinese of NCS students. Unison requests the EDB to share the research framework and the timetable on evaluation to help teachers adapt different support measures and set indicators.



Placement of ethnic minority students

De facto racial segregation in the mainstream education system

12. Despite the Government removing the label ‘designated school’ in 2013 and changing its funding mode in 2014, it has not taken any effective measures to address the high concentration (over 90%) of ethnic minority students in at least 10 public schools, comprising more than 60% total ethnic minority student population in Hong Kong. To date, there is no measure announced to address the de facto racial segregation. The segregation violates the ICERD², resulting in harmful social and economic consequences for the segregated children and their integration into the society.

13. The EDB claims that ethnic minority parents choose to send their children to schools admitting a large number of ethnic minority students. In Unison’s 2015 “Research on Ethnic Minority Parental Choice in Primary School Selection in Hong Kong”, 73% of the ethnic minority parents surveyed did not think it was important to choose a school in which most of the students are ethnic minorities and this factor was considered as the most unimportant school choice factor amongst 13 factors.

14. According to the Examination of Estimate of Expenditure 2013-14 Reply Serial No. EDB 150, there were 8 primary schools which has more than 90% of NCS students. The EDB should report to the LegCo and the public by listing out the percentage of NCS students in the student population of each school to inform the situation of de facto racial segregation in schools. Labelling effect on individual schools should not be a concern as long as the school name is not disclosed.

Misleading Primary One Allocation System (POA)

15. The Government has not provided adequate information to help ethnic minority parents make real and informed choices. During primary one admission, NCS parents whose children’s Chinese proficiency does not allow them to use Chinese as a learning medium are asked to check box 7 on the EDB Primary One Admission (POA) application form. Parents are then referred to a list of schools in Appendix 3 in the POA application. Most parents who checked box 7 assume the schools in Appendix 3 use English as the medium of instruction. To the contrary, although these schools traditionally admit more non-Chinese speaking students, they do not all use English as a learning medium and parents are not informed. In fact, the eight schools listed in Appendix 3 are

² International Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination



former “designated schools”. This practice seems to encourage parents to choose former designated schools, which continues de facto racial segregation in school.

Information for NCS parents

16. Parents commented the lack of school information on language support and measures to help ethnic minority children learn fail to provide equitable opportunities. There should be a mechanism to ensure parents, as stakeholders, find out which school is providing what sort of support for NCS students to facilitate informed school choice. Information such as availability of an adapted Chinese curriculum for ethnic minority students, teachers with professional development/training in teaching CSL, learning and teaching modes adopted, and additional measures, etc. of each school should be made available in the school profiles to help parents make informed school choice that best suits their children.

17. Unison observed there are seemingly more EDB parent’s talks this year with simultaneous interpretation services for NCS parents compared to last year. Yet the attendance of NCS parents was disappointingly low. Unison suggests the EDB conduct more outreach to the NCS community and improve promotional strategies on parent’s talks. Parents’ understanding of the education system is important in supporting their children’s learning.

18. Parents who do not know Chinese often find it extremely difficult to communicate with mainstream schools on Chinese notices or with teachers who hesitate to speak in English. Thus the EDB should monitor this situation by collecting information on support measures to improve parents’ communications with schools and ensure a welcoming inclusive learning environment. The EDB should encourage parents to report to the EDB if schools refuse to provide any assistance.

Support measures for NCS students

Transparency and effectiveness of enhanced funding support

19. Since 2014/15 school year, approximately HKD 400 million has been provided to schools to facilitate the implementation of the Learning Framework and creation of an inclusive learning environment in schools. However, Unison has received calls from school teachers to enquire about the use of funds, since some teachers are clueless about effective ways to help NCS students in Chinese learning. Guidance should be provided with the funding application. A transparent



monitoring and evaluation system on the funding should be in place to fulfill the accountability of public money.

Support to NCS students and parents in mainstream schools

20. Although Cantonese is not the mother tongue of all local students here in Hong Kong, under the mother tongue policy, most mainstream primary and secondary schools use Chinese as the medium of instruction. NCS students allocated to these schools do not only find it difficult to catch up with the mainstream Chinese lessons, but also struggle a lot in other subjects taught in Cantonese. Unison urges the EDB to provide support for NCS students in learning other subjects.

Conclusion

21. According to 2011 Census, the number of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong increased significantly by 31.2 % over the past 10 years and it is on the rise, as evident in statistics from the EDB. Ethnic minority students in mainstream schools will become the norm. Unison urges the Government to develop and implement a comprehensive policy and procedures to enable Chinese language learners develop their talents and acquire the knowledge and skills they need to achieve personal success and to participate in and contribute to the Hong Kong Society.

22. The policy should not be limited to providing funding and piecemeal support only; (a) effective and clear procedures for reception, orientation, placement and programming for NCS students, (b) curriculum for Chinese language learners, (c) procedures and guidelines for assessment and reporting to parents, (d) systematic pedagogical training for teachers and administrators, (e) procedures for collecting data related to the learning of NCS students and for monitoring and tracing their progress to support public accountability, should be in place. A concrete policy goal with implementation plans, output indicators, and transparent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be available as soon as possible.