

For discussion on 1 June, 2018

**Hong Kong Unison's Submissions to the Panel of Education
on the Development of Quality Assurance in Kindergarten Education**

Purpose

1. Hong Kong Unison is a non-governmental organization which advocates equal and equitable education for ethnic minority children. This submission expresses our views on how quality assurance in kindergarten (KG) can be enhanced to ensure progressive Chinese learning of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in an inclusive environment.

Background

2. KG is the golden age for language development. It is important for ethnic minority children to build a strong language (i.e. Chinese) foundation at kindergarten so that their learning and achievement gaps can be minimized to enable them thrive in the mainstream society.
3. Under the Free Quality Kindergarten Scheme, a grant has been set up for KGs admitting 8 or more NCS students. Admission Guidelines have been revised to include bilingual application forms and arrangement of interpreters by KGs for NCS applicants at interviews, to ensure equal admission opportunities. The Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide (2017) has also been updated to guide teachers to better facilitate Chinese learning of NCS children. However, the above measures can only be useful if the Education Bureau (EDB) closely keeps track of the overall situation of NCS children and KGs' compliance with the guidelines.

Refinement of Performance Indicators (Kindergarten) (PIs)

4. From our daily contact with the ethnic minority community, we often see NCS children who had been through 3 years of local kindergarten acquire very low proficiency of Chinese. Ethnic minority parents inform Unison that in order to 'cater learning needs of NCS children', KGs tend not to develop their children's Chinese ability and teach them a lower level of Chinese.
5. On Page 10 in the *PIs*, last point under Domain IV states that "*4.2 Language Ability*" under the area of "*Cognitive Development*" refers to the mother-tongue development of children who are mostly taught in mother tongue at kindergartens. Kindergartens should not use the same performance indicators to assess children's learning in a second language. Since KG applies the PIs in teaching and in School Self Evaluation, EDB should clarify if they are suggesting another performance indicators on language ability of ethnic minority children whose mother tongue is neither English nor Chinese. Such statement actually misleads KGs to teach NCS children a lower Chinese level.



Enhancing transparency

6. Unison is pleased to know that the English version of the Quality Review (QR) Report will be uploaded onto EDB's website starting 2018/19 school year so that transparency and accountability to the ethnic minority community can be enhanced.
7. However, Unison's research on 'Accountability of Kindergarten to the Ethnic Minority Community' (2017) found that not all QR reports (of schools that admit NCS children) reflect the provisions and effectiveness of support measures for NCS children and parents.
8. Unison's research also showed that practices and measures implemented by some KGs are not in line with the principle of early integration for NCS children as set out by the EDB, yet EDB had not made recommendations in the QR reports for these KGs to take rectify the measures. For instance, some KGs had up to or more than half of their student's composition NCS students, and some used either English or Putonghua as the medium of instruction to conduct language and other classroom activities.
9. Currently the EDB does not have any measures yet to ensure the transparency and accountability to the public on the grant intended to provide schools with additional resources to better support the teaching and learning for NCS students. Moreover, the public are not informed on the effectiveness of the grant.

Recommendations

10. The EDB should **clarify the PIs** to guide KGs to have the same expectation on Chinese learning for both Chinese and NCS students, which is to ensure smooth transitioning to primary one. Unison believes the same performance indicators should be used to assess children's language ability in the language they are taught in. KGs should *cater the learning needs for NCS students* by adopting different teaching strategies and support measures to develop their language ability.
11. The EDB review team should **make recommendations to kindergartens in the QR report** once they observed malpractices in kindergartens and breaches to the Curriculum and Administration Guides; such as those unfavorable to integration and over-concentration of NCS students.
12. An accountability mechanisms with transparency, monitoring and evaluation are necessary to ensure the implementation of policy goals. The NCS **grant reports should be uploaded onto school's or EDB's websites** in both Chinese and English versions, including spending, the learning progress and language improvement of children for the public to assess the effectiveness of the grants.