

Submission to Panel of Education by an ethnic minority Parents' group
Voicing out for our children's future

We are a group of ethnic minority parents whose children study in Kindergarten, Primary and Secondary schools in Hong Kong. Covid-19 has struck us hard and the suspension of the schools for a long period has visibly affected the learning of the students. During the pandemic the daily struggles of Non-Chinese Speaking (NCS) students to learn Chinese was amplified as support classes were not provided by the school. We were unable to get help from the tutorial centers as they were all closed during the pandemic.

Chinese is a tough subject for our children and online learning made it even worse. Due to lack of proper classes and constant revision, children forget the lessons learnt at school. We would like to raise some of the difficulties faced during Covid-19 and others that existed previously which never got resolved.

1) Online learning difficulty during Covid-19

- i. Problem of devices: Most children do not have individual devices to use for online lessons and have to use mobile phones to attend the lessons. The screen is small and hence it is difficult to see the lesson being taught which hampers proper learning of the student. We hope the government can provide proper devices to economically disadvantaged children.
- ii. Poor internet connection: With poor internet connection the student's learning is interrupted. The students sometimes cannot hear the teachers properly. Due to unstable connection the students miss part of the lessons which is not repeated later. As the lessons are not recorded, there is no special assistance that could be given to the students to catch up. Stable and uninterrupted internet connection should be essentially provided to all students.
- iii. Students' educational need being hampered: Kindergarten and lower primary students are unable to use the devices properly for online classes and many parents struggle to connect to classes as they are not technologically literate. No proper training of using the online platform for online learning is provided to parents. The number of students is too large for teachers to ensure that all the children fully understand the lesson. Teachers deliver the lesson and cannot discern which student need more attention or help.
- iv. Concentration issue: It is difficult for the children to concentrate in front of the screen for long period so the parents have to sit with their children in every lesson. The parents have to help with the children homework too which put additional pressure on them.

- v. No Extra support during class suspension period: In the beginning of class suspension, only recordings were provided to explain and to teach the kids to do homework; no live lesson was offered. Students are not interested in watching the recordings. Therefore, some parents continue to send their children to school to finish their homework as no other support being found.
- vi. **Our recommendations**: We hope the government can provide proper devices to economically disadvantaged children. Stable and uninterrupted internet connection should be essentially provided to all students. Smaller class size and class duration should be 30 mins. Basic training to access online classes, materials and recordings, uploading homework should be taught to parents who face difficulty in handling technology.

2) Chinese learning difficulties

- i. Losing interest in learning Chinese: Kindergarten children find it hard to learn Chinese through online teaching since teachers simply keep on talking in Cantonese and no explanation or translation was given to the students. Students could not understand what the teachers had taught which was very discouraging for them and they are losing interest in learning Chinese.. Parents suggested to the teachers if they could provide any opportunity or extra lesson time to give explanations to the NCS students, so that it would be less of a struggle for the students to transition from K3 to P1. Parents have to constantly seek for outside resources and constantly worry about their children Chinese learning.
- ii. Inadequate and inappropriate support provided by schools: There is hardly any assistance provided by the schools to help NCS children to learn Chinese. Worse still, the teachers ask the NCS students to copy the homework answers. After several complaints, the school did provide a tutoring scheme for one month, but after it stopped, there were no follow ups. The schools sometimes provided extra lessons during snack time and this is most inconvenient for young children as their rest time, which is supposed to be treated as a shor. Till now all the arrangements were unfair and useless for improving the Chinese learning experience of the NCS students.
- iii. Missing a well-established teaching curriculum: Although the school offered separate Chinese lessons for NCS students to catch up with Chinese learning, there was no standard curriculum for the students and the teachers to follow. Some students might know the word without understanding its meaning. The parents cannot identify and understand the level of Chinese their children are learning. After all, not all NCS students were lucky enough to receive proper support. This creates inequalities and unfairness in education.

- iv. **Our recommendations:** Timely and adequate in-class and after class support should be provided for enhancing the Chinese learning of NCS students. Along with the summer bridging program there should be all-year round intensive learning for K3 NCS students who will transition to primary. All schools should be provided with proper Chinese curriculum and books. The learning across all schools should be the same to give equal opportunity to NCS students to learn.

3) Problems in communication with the school

- i. Translation support for homework: It is extremely hard for the parents to understand the homework as no proper translation was provided. Google Translate is not an ideal translation application. Moreover, as there was no face to face tutoring services, it was very hard for the parents to seek help.
- ii. Communication between the school and the parents: Some schools do not provide notices with English translation. Interpretation service is not provided for parents workshops in school hence rendering it impossible for NCS parents to join them. Most of the school workshop are conducted in Chinese hence schools do not bother to send invitation to the NCS parents simply because they cannot understand the language rather than providing interpretation services which shows bias towards the NCS parents.
- iii. Parents' group: To assist the learning needs of the NCS students, the parents had to rely on the parent's WhatsApp group created by the school but there is no other efficient methods.
- iv. **Our recommendations:** Homework instructions should be translated in English so that parents can assist their children to complete the homework. School notices must be translated in English. Schools should arrange interpretation service during parent's workshops and invite NCS parents to all relevant workshops. Language barrier is one of the main challenges which restricts NCS parents' participation in school activities and other events. Active use of translation and interpretation services will help parents to be sincerely involved in their child's education.

4) Funding Support

- i. No transparency: Schools did not disclose their budget plans and reports on how they had made use of the subsidy provided by the government for the support of NCS students even though parents actively ask them. The school ignored the parent's queries regarding the topic. No transparency was provided.

- ii. **Our recommendations:** Schools should disclose to parents' the plans and reports on the usage of the NCS subsidy and involve parents' at the planning stage. Parents can outline the needs of students and schools and parents can work together.

5) **Bullying or discrimination**

- i. Parents want their children to study in local Chinese schools to have better Chinese language proficiency and Chinese speaking environment for better integration. But in schools with fewer NCS students, bullying and discrimination is prevalent. These NCS students cannot have a joyful school life. We observed that the bullying happens in P.5 or older grades. Children refuse to tell their parents, teachers and school counsellors and suffer silently as they do not want to worry their parents and fear that they will have to stop going to school. Hence parents are in a dilemma while choosing school for their children and are afraid to send them to local Chinese schools.
- ii. Segregation: Parents do not want to send their children to study in former designated or concentrated schools. However, aware of the problem of bullying and discrimination, as well as the learning problems and lack of support in mainstream schools, they are reluctant to send their children to those mainstream schools. Hence, parents end up choosing former designated schools instead.
- iii. **Our recommendations:** Schools staff and all students must be educated about respecting cultural diversity and respecting students from diverse race. Schools can organise events and activity to facilitate and encourage cross-racial friendship among children.

6) **Language proficiency of school teachers**

- i. Incorrect pronunciation: Teachers are mostly well-trained but problems occurred with their English pronunciation. Translating from English to Chinese or translating from Chinese to English was not easy for them. The teachers' pronunciation might not be 100% correct, which was acceptable as long as the students could understand. However, this has created a problem that students might end up learning correct Chinese but incorrect English.
- ii. **Our recommendations:** To deal with such problems, the teachers are suggested to write down the words for parents to teach their kids as well. The schools also need to provide

appropriate training to the teachers to make sure they have better English language proficiency to teach NCS students.

7) **Special Education Needs**

- i. For NCS students with special education needs (SEN), some schools offer individual person to come and teach the kid once a month. But no regular class support is provided to help the child and to monitor the child's progress. Counsellor helped communicate with the teachers, as well as the kids at other times.
- ii. **Our recommendations:** Better and regular learning support should be provided by the school to SEN NCS students.

(the end)