



For discussion on 3 September 2021

**Submission on Progress on Supporting Chinese Learning and Teaching for non-Chinese Speaking Students**

**Background**

1. Hong Kong Unison ('Unison') is a local non-governmental organization that serves ethnic minority residents of Hong Kong. Through promoting policy change, we aim to eliminate racial discrimination in Hong Kong and ensure equal and equitable education rights for ethnic minority children. In this paper, we wish to bring to the government's attention the issues regarding the education of ethnic minorities and we urge the government to look into educational improvement without delay.
2. Unison understands that the Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented a series of measures for supporting Chinese learning and teaching for NCS students and in fact, relevant expenditure has increased from \$244.5 million in 2015/16 to \$456.3 million<sup>1</sup> in 2019/20. However, the effectiveness of such measures is not supported by evidence.
3. The EDB conducted a 3-year (2014/15 to 2016/17) review on the support measures and mentioned at the 8 November 2018 Panel on Education meeting that they would announce the findings of the review after discussing with the Curriculum Development Council. However, to date the findings have not been shared. In fact, when such measures were introduced, the EDB stated that reviews would be done every 3 years. Hence, the EDB ought to announce the findings of 2 reviews.

**Lack of a Chinese language curriculum for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students**

4. There are several factors leading to the low Chinese proficiency and learning difficulties of NCS students; one of which is the lack of a Chinese language curriculum for NCS students. Although the EDB maintained that there should only be one Chinese language curriculum, schools reflected that achieving the learning target of the mainstream curriculum is the biggest challenge<sup>2</sup>. It is not the first time that Unison and other organizations (including the

<sup>1</sup> Education support measures for non-Chinese speaking students, Audit Commission, 31 March 2021.

[https://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf\\_e/e76ch02.pdf](https://www.aud.gov.hk/pdf_e/e76ch02.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> A Study on the Challenges Faced by Mainstream Schools in Educating Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong, Oxfam Hong Kong, January 2020.

[https://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/upload/ResearchReport/researchreport\\_20200115\\_e.pdf](https://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/upload/ResearchReport/researchreport_20200115_e.pdf)



EOC<sup>3</sup>) urge the government to develop a full-fledged Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum from kindergarten to secondary school, complete with specific pedagogy, corresponding teaching tools and textbooks, students' performance indicators, systematic teaching training, and home school cooperation.

5. Despite effective teaching and learning materials developed by a few schools using government funding, these materials are not widely shared across the system due to various reasons e.g. copyright. The EDB should provide support to remove such barriers so that more schools can enjoy effective teaching and learning materials for NCS students.
6. The EDB has developed a set of Chinese language learning and teaching materials for NCS students from primary one to six. The EDB should request schools to track the progress of the students to monitor the suitability and effectiveness of the materials.

#### **Monitoring of NCS grants**

7. According to the Audit Commission<sup>4</sup>, 30 to 50% of primary and secondary schools utilized less than half of the NCS Grant, which brings into question the efficiency and effectiveness of providing such funding. Moreover, although schools are required to submit school plans and reports, because there is no performance targets for students, the government cannot monitor the effectiveness of the grants. The EDB should develop guidelines for the use of the Grant, metrics to track the outcomes of NCS students' Chinese learning, and transparent procedures to monitor the usage and effectiveness of the Grant to support public accountability

#### **Enhance teacher's capacity in teaching and caring of ethnic minority students**

8. Despite the Education Bureau (EDB) offering professional development to equip teachers to teach Chinese from a second language perspective, the participation rates are poor, which casts doubt on the efficacy of the policy. According to the above mentioned Audit Report, in 2019/20 among 13,794 teachers teaching Chinese Language in the 988 schools, only 3,808 teachers attended training, and 1,744 of them attended training for 5 hour or less. Additionally, the Report stated only 99 applications have been received and 89 Chinese

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<sup>3</sup> Closing the Gap: Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities, Equal Opportunities Commission, September 2019,

[https://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/upload/ResearchReport/Closing\\_the\\_Gap\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](https://www.eoc.org.hk/EOC/upload/ResearchReport/Closing_the_Gap_Full_Report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid 1



teachers granted since 2014/15 for the “Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language)”. The lack of participation in training reflects that there is not enough incentive for teachers to attend training courses and hence the needs of NCS students cannot be fulfilled and their learning affected.

9. In view of the low training participation of teachers, we recommend the government supports schools and teachers from various approaches. Firstly, we urge the EDB to mandatorily require all schools, regardless of whether they admit NCS students, to be equipped with a certain number of teachers trained in teaching NCS students, both in teaching Chinese as a second language and cultural sensitivity so that teachers can confidently teach NCS students. Secondly, to consider the election manifesto of the incumbent Chief Executive, i.e. to establish a “professional ladder for primary and secondary school teachers with expertise in certain subjects, and encouraging teachers to acquire specialised skills in teaching Chinese as a second language ...”. Lastly, the government should provide permanent teaching posts to trained teachers to cater to the learning needs of NCS students more attentively, such as providing after-school consolidation and split-class/ small-group learning.

### **Eliminate de facto segregation in the mainstream education system**

10. Although the ‘designated schools’ policy has been abolished, the existence of Box 7 and Appendix 3 in the application form for Admission to Primary One perpetuates de facto segregation (note: Box 7 indicates that the applicant child “cannot use Chinese as learning medium”, while Appendix 3 is a list of schools that “traditionally admit more NCS students”.) The Office of the Ombudsman<sup>5</sup> in 2019 also recommended the EDB should in the long term consider abolishing the Schools on the List mechanism. Unison strongly urges the government to review this practice without delay.
11. Effective measures should also be taken to eliminate *de facto* racial segregation in the mainstream education system, e.g. stringent monitoring of support measures in schools with additional funding; establishing education outreach teams to enhance parents’

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<sup>5</sup> Government’s support for non-Chinese speaking students, Office of the Ombudsman, 15 February 2019  
[https://ofomb.ombudsman.hk/abc/files/2019-2\\_FR\\_DI422\\_Governments\\_support\\_for\\_non-Chinese\\_speaking\\_students.pdf](https://ofomb.ombudsman.hk/abc/files/2019-2_FR_DI422_Governments_support_for_non-Chinese_speaking_students.pdf)



knowledge of mainstream school admissions and support; and producing Announcements in the Public Interests (APIs) to promote the benefits of racially diverse schools.

### **Career guidance and continued Chinese learning**

12. Due to social and racial stereotypes and loopholes in Chinese language education system, the career development of NCS students is largely limited. Many of them are constrained to work as manual labour, such as construction workers and food delivery drivers, rendering them unable to achieve upward mobility. The Audit Report mentions that although the demand from schools for on-site support service on life planning education was high, it could not be met because of limited capacity of service providers and their lukewarm response. Unison believes it is imperative to provide quality and timely life planning education for the NCS students. Service providers must undergo training to increase their cultural competence to cater the needs of NCS students in life planning.
13. To enhance the Chinese proficiency of post-secondary NCS students, the government should encourage tertiary educational institutes to provide free-of-charge Chinese bridging courses for ethnic minority students. The courses should focus on teaching practical/professional Chinese, equipping NCS students with the ability to communicate in Chinese at local workplaces.

### **Supporting NCS students with special education needs**

14. Most NCS parents require English assessments for their special educational needs (SEN) children. However, the waiting time of English assessment service offered by the Hospital Authority is extremely long, at least 15 months. While waiting, no other assistance is given and causing NCS student to lose out on the golden time of language acquisition. Apart from this, NCS parents commonly encounter the problem of language barrier which leads to ineffective communication, and mis-diagnosis. For example, there have been cases of medical personnel mis-diagnosing children with speech problem instead of language issues.
15. We suggest the government to increase funding support to SEN assessment for ethnic minority children, so as to reduce the waiting time for such services and enhance follow-up services. Moreover, the government should request medical personnel to utilize interpretation services for ethnic minorities and develop accreditation for interpretation and



translation. This is to guarantee effective communication and clear explanation between NCS parents and medical personnel to provide appropriate educational assistance.

### **Facilitating home-school cooperation**

16. Owing to language barrier and access to information, NCS parents, particularly grassroot families, are less able to support their children's education at home. To help NCS parents better support their children academically, we suggest the government to review courses organized by NGOs for NCS parents and make sure information being provided is up-to-date and practical. Meanwhile, the government should encourage local schools to provide language assistance, for instance, offering interpretation during parent-teacher meetings and at Parent-Teacher Association to boost participation of NCS parents. Such measures will allow NCS parents to explore and understand the school life of their children, as well as to establish a closer relationship with the schools and better integration.

### **Kindergarten admission and monitoring**

17. It is not uncommon that NCS parents lack adequate information on kindergarten admission, especially the support that is provided by schools. This constrains students' and parents' choice of kindergarten. From the Audit Report, although kindergartens are required to submit financial plans and reports regarding the government subsidy, in 2018/19, 18 kindergartens delayed the submission of financial plans and 73 kindergartens delayed the submission of financial reports. Additionally, despite the fact that such reports are useful in helping NCS parents choose kindergartens, it is not compulsory to disclose the reports to the general public. In view of the obstacles encountered by the NCS parents, the government should reinforce its supervision of kindergartens by increasing manpower in Kindergarten Inspection Team, so as to closely monitor kindergartens' compliance with the Guidelines on Kindergarten Admission Arrangements, the Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide, and the Kindergarten Administration Guide. The government should also require schools to report the Chinese learning progress of NCS students under the subsidy. For parents' reference, schools should upload proposals and reports of the additional grant for Chinese learning of NCS children and early integration.



**Curriculum of Citizenship and Social Development**

18. The recent education reform have raised concerns that the multicultural and ethnic background of Hong Kong students may be ignored and marginalization intensified. The government should be reminded to emphasize on Hong Kong's multicultural and diverse historical background, and discuss the contribution of various ethnic groups in Hong Kong, so as to enhance ethnic minority's sense of belonging to Hong Kong. Relevant teaching materials should be culturally sensitive to avoid unconscious prejudice and trivializing the issue of racial discrimination. How to coexist with people with diverse cultural backgrounds is also an important part of values education.

**E-learning support under the pandemic**

19. Unison welcomes the government to provide e-learning support to students with financial difficulties during COVID-19 to adapt to the "new normal" of education. However, the cancellation of face to face Chinese language classes, after-school support, Chinese language tutorials seriously affected the learning progress of NCS students. We urge the government to diversify the support modes, such as continuing after-school Chinese support and NGO Chinese tutorials in virtual classes.