

Press Releases

LCQ14: Support measures for non-Chinese speaking students

Following is a question by the Hon Emily Lau and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Michael Suen, in the Legislative Council today (November 2):

Question:

According to the statistics in 2006, 22.4% of the young persons aged 19 to 24 studied full-time post-secondary programmes in Hong Kong, while the corresponding percentage among South Asian young persons (including Filipinos, Indonesians, Indians, Thais, Nepalese and Pakistanis) was only 5.4%, and they stand a much slimmer chance of pursuing post-secondary education than their local counterparts. Regarding the issue of education for ethnic minority (EM) children, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) given that although the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) had, in its report released in July this year, pointed out that our education system did not provide EM children with a level-playing field for education advancement, and had put forward a number of recommendations, the authorities have not yet provided a response or discussed the report with EOC, of the reasons for that;

(b) whether the authorities will accept the following recommendations put forward by EOC to the Education Bureau; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that:

(i) development of a Chinese proficiency testing system with curriculum taught in stages, graded assessment and accreditation, and provision of an alternative language qualification for educational advancement as well as a benchmark for language proficiency required by different trades and job groups; and

(ii) provision of language and cultural programmes for EM children at pre-primary level;

(c) given that EOC had pointed out in its report that "while it would be rare that an EM child is refused admission to an educational establishment on the ground of his race, it is more often that he is rejected due to his lesser proficiency in Chinese as compared with other Chinese speaking competitors. The Chinese proficiency requirement, if unjustly administered by individual schools, may amount to indirect discrimination under the Race Discrimination Ordinance", whether it knows if EOC will, when necessary, consider conducting formal investigations in this regard; if EOC will do so, of the circumstances under which EOC will conduct formal investigations; if EOC will not do so, the reasons for that; and

(d) given that EOC had pointed out in its report that due to the absence of adequate support in the mainstream schools, some of the parents could only choose designated schools, and there was a view that the policy of giving the choice of designated schools might in itself be discriminatory because it reinforced segregation, whether it knows if EOC will, when necessary, consider conducting formal investigations in this regard; if EOC will do so, of the circumstances under which EOC will conduct formal investigations; if EOC will not do so, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) The Government is committed to facilitating non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students' early adaptation to the local education system and integration into the community.

Measures to support NCS students have been progressively implemented since 2006. We encourage NCS parents to send their children to mainstream schools like their local counterparts, and facilitate those NCS students who have started late in learning the Chinese Language or have not been given the opportunity to learn the local Chinese Language curriculum to attain an alternative Chinese Language qualification. The number of NCS students sitting for General Certificate of Secondary Education (Chinese) (GCSE (Chinese)) has progressively increased to about 190 in 2011, as compared with 10 in 2007 when the examination was first administered in Hong Kong. Out of these 190 students, about 170 have attained the alternative Chinese qualification. In 2011, 17 out of 64 NCS students studying in Secondary 7 of public-sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools who sat for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination have received offers from institutions under the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS). Separately, about 250 NCS students are taking full-time locally accredited self-financing degree or sub-degree programmes.

The support measures for NCS students are developmental in nature and subject to refinement, as appropriate, to meet the changing circumstances and needs. The Education Bureau (EDB) is considering seriously the Report on Education for Ethnic Minorities published by Working Group of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on July 11, 2011 and will maintain dialogue with the Working Group. We are examining the support measures, having taken into account views of stakeholders, with a view to effectively enhancing NCS students' learning effectiveness.

(b) (i) To address the practical needs of NCS students in learning the Chinese Language, the EDB issued the "Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for NCS Students" (the Supplementary Guide) and dispatched a series of learning and teaching materials to schools in late 2008. The Supplementary Guide, including four curriculum modes of "immersion in Chinese Language lessons", "bridging / transition", "specific learning purposes" and "integration", caters for the diverse needs and aspirations of NCS students and supports their learning of the Chinese Language at different stages of development.

Our strategy of providing multiple curriculum modes under a common curriculum framework, based on local pedagogical practices as well as experiences of other places, has been widely accepted by schools. Offering an alternative Chinese Language curriculum and assessment with pre-set simpler contents and lower standards for NCS students will only limit their learning opportunities and development. In other words, it will hinder the development of those NCS students who are able to learn at a pace comparable to their local counterparts. Research findings also suggest that given the support and empowerment, the learning pace of some NCS students can be on a par with that of local students.

To further support NCS students in learning the Chinese Language, and cater for the needs of schools for more Chinese learning and teaching materials that are suitable for NCS students, we have developed two sets of "textbooks" covering different learning stages of the primary and secondary levels by adapting and consolidating those learning and teaching materials collected from experienced schools which are found effective. These "textbooks" were dispatched free of charge to schools for use by teachers and NCS students in 2009 and 2010.

Based on a study on NCS students' performance in Chinese Language, we have commissioned the University of Hong Kong to develop assessment tools covering the dimensions of characters

recognition, characters writing, listening, speaking, reading and writing for schools' internal use. These assessment tools have been uploaded onto the EDB's website for schools to assess the learning outcome of Chinese Language of their NCS students with a view to setting specific learning objectives so as to enhance the effectiveness of learning and teaching with reference to the assessment results.

Besides, to enhance NCS students' competitiveness in the workplace, we are planning to launch a Pilot Scheme on Workplace Chinese Language with programmes pegged to the Qualifications Framework.

(b) (ii) Our pre-primary curriculum design is underpinned by an integration approach with kindergartens to create a language-rich environment in which children, including NCS children, can develop their language abilities through try-outs, exploration and interaction. The teaching contents and pace would also be adapted according to their needs.

NCS parents are encouraged to send their children to kindergartens offering a local curriculum to enable them to learn the Chinese Language as early as possible. When examining our support measures for NCS students, we will also consider extending our support to NCS children in kindergartens to facilitate their early adaptation to the local education system.

(c) We will meet the EOC in November 2011 to discuss the contents and recommendations of its report. We understand that the EOC is not considering a formal investigation for the time being since the matters are now at a stage of mutual interaction. According to the EOC, if there is information showing that the Chinese proficiency requirement may constitute systematic discrimination against ethnic minority students, and the Administration refuses to examine or consider improvement measures, the EOC will take further actions, including formal investigations.

(d) According to the EOC, it will carry out investigations if there is information showing that a school refuses to admit a student on racial grounds. It will also consider formal investigations if there is information showing that racial segregation has arisen out of inadequate support by the Administration.

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