

## **Press Releases**

---

LCQ18: Chinese learning support for ethnic minority children  
\*\*\*\*\*

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 (May 9):

Question:

In its report released in July last year, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) pointed out that the education system did not provide ethnic minority (EM) children with a level-playing field for education advancement because of their poor academic attainment in Chinese, and urged the authorities to take improvement measures which include provision of Chinese language support programmes for EM children at pre-primary level. It has been reported that according to a survey report released by a community group in April this year, most of the kindergartens being interviewed were of the view that EM students' proficiency in Chinese varied, but only a small number of kindergartens could offer additional support for them, and only 2% of kindergarten teachers had received professional training in teaching EM students. In this connection, will the Executive Authorities inform this Council:

(a) whether they had taken any new measure since the release of the EOC report last year to support EM children's learning of Chinese at pre-primary level; if not, of the reasons for that; if they had, of the details (including the number of EM children who benefitted and the amount of public funds involved);

(b) whether they know the number of EM students currently receiving pre-primary education, with a breakdown by the grade in which they are studying; among them, of the respective proportions of South Asian and East Asian students, and race distribution; and the number of kindergartens/nurseries admitting these students;

(c) whether they will take on board the recommendation of the aforesaid community group by offering Chinese learning support to EM children prior to their admission to primary schools, so as to prevent their opportunities of being admitted to the primary schools they desire from being affected because their academic attainment in Chinese is not as good as that of Chinese-speaking students; and

(d) whether the authorities have assessed if EM children's opportunities of education advancement are affected by their proficiency in Chinese; if so, of the details; given that EOC has indicated that it would take further actions, including formal investigations, if there was information showing that the Chinese proficiency requirement of individual schools might constitute systematic discrimination against EM students and the Government refused to examine or consider improvement measures, whether the authorities have examined and taken any improvement measure; if so, of the details; if not, whether they know if the EOC will conduct any formal investigation?

Reply:

President,

(a) The Government is committed to facilitating non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students' early adaptation to the local education system and early integration into the community. NCS parents are encouraged to send their children to local kindergartens

(Note). They may, like their local counterparts, apply for fee subsidy through the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme introduced in 2007, the subsequent refinement to the financial support of which has widened parental choice and facilitated children's access to quality kindergarten education.

The learning and teaching in kindergartens should be underpinned by an integrated approach to create a stimulating and language-rich environment, providing students with authentic, meaningful and developmentally appropriate language learning experiences through try-outs, exploration and interpersonal interactions. Such a naturalistic and holistic approach to language learning in local kindergartens is considered essential for communication purposes, and is thus conducive to NCS children's development of Chinese language skills, social development, adaptation to local primary schools and early integration into the society.

Having taken into account the views of stakeholders including discussion at the Legislative Council Panel on Education and further dialogue with the Equal Opportunities Commission in response to its Working Group Report issued on July 11, 2011, we have undertaken, among others, to promote an early exposure to an immersed Chinese environment for NCS children in local kindergartens to smooth their progression to mainstream primary schools through three-pronged measures as follows -

(i) We would enhance the provision of school-based professional support services to kindergartens by according due priority to the aspect of "offering support to NCS children" when inviting schools in April 2012 to apply for the support services in the 2012/13 school year. With "offering support to NCS children" as one of the focus areas for application, the professional support services to be rendered to teachers in designing teaching and learning activities would focus on facilitating children's acquisition of Chinese in an authentic environment. As a start, school-based support services are provided to 31 local kindergartens with about 470 NCS children in total in the 2011/12 school year.

(ii) On teacher empowerment, we have planned to enrich the content of the seminars / workshops on young children development and learner diversity, which have been organised since the 2010/11 school year with around 120 school heads / teachers having participated. Curriculum development visits and focus group interviews will continue to be conducted to collect information and good practices on catering for learner diversity, particularly on NCS children's learning of Chinese, for organising more experience sharing sessions in the 2012/13 school year and for the development of tailor-made teaching and learning materials for kindergartens.

(iii) As regards parent education, we have organised and would continue to organise parent briefing sessions on school admission dedicated for NCS parents in districts with relatively more NCS residents. In view of the positive response, we have planned to invite kindergartens and schools which have accumulated experience in supporting NCS students to disseminate key messages to parents at the upcoming briefings, Support Services Centre for Ethnic Minorities funded by Home Affairs Department, radio programmes, Maternal and Child Health Centres through promotion videos and in the newspapers for ethnic minority groups, etc.

The expenses involved in the above measures are subsumed in the overall expenditure of the Education Bureau and a breakdown by item is not available.

The above support services need time to take root and are developmental in nature. We will make refinement as appropriate to meet the changing circumstances and needs and step up the development of more structured programmes to make the learning and

teaching of Chinese more tangible and interesting for NCS children.

(b) The number of NCS children studying in kindergartens with breakdown by grade and the number of kindergartens are at the Annex.

(c) We attach great importance to addressing the community's concern about Chinese learning support to NCS children. To further arouse their interest in learning Chinese, we have, through the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research, a Committee advising the Government on language education issues, invited proposals to organise district-based projects / programmes to motivate NCS children to learn Chinese through fun activities such as drama, creative art, etc.. The pilot run of these district-based projects / programmes in districts with relatively more NCS children will start in July 2012. The actual expenditure and the number of beneficiaries involved would be subject to the number of projects to be approved.

(d) We have undertaken to examine the support for NCS students, with a view to stepping up the promotion of an early start for NCS students to learn the Chinese language for better adaptation to local primary schools, expanding the school network for supporting NCS students and strengthening school-based professional support to schools so that more schools, in addition to the existing designated schools, would be involved in gearing up for the implementation of the Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for NCS Students and catering for the diverse aspirations in academic study and career pursuit of NCS students.

Apart from the measures set out in part (a) above relating to the support to NCS children at pre-primary level, we have planned to step up the support to NCS students at primary and secondary levels by:

(i) formulating different modalities of school-based professional support to ensure that schools can provide an environment for immersion in the Chinese language;

(ii) expanding the network of schools supporting NCS students by restructuring the platform for sharing practices and experiences on the development and adoption of appropriate teaching pedagogies among schools admitting NCS students;

(iii) putting in place a framework for objective and evidence-based assessment of the cost-effectiveness and viability of the support measures and evaluation of the support modes for schools; and

(iv) kick-starting a longitudinal study on the modalities of school-based professional support and NCS students' performance in learning the Chinese language, with a view to evaluating the efficacy of the support for NCS students with diverse learning abilities.

Note: Kindergartens, kindergartens-cum-child care centres and schools with kindergarten classes are referred to as "kindergartens".

Ends/Wednesday, May 9, 2012  
Issued at HKT 12:31

NNNN