

Press Releases

LCQ14: Support for non-Chinese speaking students

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Eddie Ng Hak-kim, in the Legislative Council today (November 14):

Question:

Some ethnic minorities have relayed to me that the number of ethnic minority (EM) students has been increasing in recent years, and such students include both school children and young people born and bred in Hong Kong, as well as those who have resettled in Hong Kong. Such ethnic minorities have also indicated that due to differences in cultural and family background, EM students encounter great difficulties in learning the Chinese language, and they are often unable to be admitted to mainstream secondary schools and universities, and as a result, both their future studies and employment are affected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the current number of school-age ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, with a breakdown by (i) whether they were born and bred in Hong Kong or have resettled in Hong Kong, and (ii) whether they are currently studying in mainstream or non-mainstream primary and secondary schools;

(b) of the support currently provided to EM students by mainstream schools; whether the Government will consider allocating more resources to enhance the support for EM students in learning the Chinese language after school, and also consider afresh developing a Chinese language curriculum specifically designed for the ethnic minorities, in order to enable them to learn the Chinese language more easily;

(c) whether it will provide funding to schools for employing an additional number of qualified EM teachers, teaching assistants or janitors, who will also perform translation work, so as to help EM students at school and improve their learning conditions; if it will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) of the measures currently in place to help EM young people to pursue continuing education and employment, especially those who can read, speak, write and listen to Chinese but are not able to attain a pass in the Chinese language subject in school examinations and public examinations?

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to supporting the integration of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students into the community, including facilitating their early adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese Language and ensuring equal opportunities in school admission for NCS and local students.

(a) A breakdown of the number of school-age ethnic minority (EM) children by place of birth (Hong Kong or elsewhere) is at Annex.

For the planning of education support measures, students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese are broadly categorised as NCS students, which include both EM and ethnic Chinese students. The numbers of NCS students studying in "mainstream" and "non-mainstream" schools are also set out at Annex.

(b) and (c) At present, NCS students spread across various public-sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools. On school support for NCS students, we provide some schools (Note 1) with NCS students with a recurrent grant which may be deployed to recruit additional staff such as teaching assistants for supporting NCS students. Schools may also consolidate other grants to cater for the needs of NCS students in accordance with their overall plans and school-based strategies. Besides, we also provide these schools with school-based professional support services to facilitate the development of school-based support measures and learning and teaching (L&T) materials and the accumulation of experience for sharing with other schools admitting NCS students, thus benefiting all NCS students. In tandem, to reinforce what NCS students have learnt in Chinese Language lessons, we have commissioned the University of Hong Kong to operate the Chinese Language Learning Support Centre in 15 venues in districts with more NCS students to provide remedial programmes for NCS students after school or during holidays. Eligible schools participating in the project of After-school Extended Chinese Learning are provided with a subsidy to put in place diversified extended Chinese learning programmes for their own NCS students and those from other schools.

The support measures are developmental in nature and subject to refinement as appropriate to meet the changing circumstances and needs. We are actively reviewing the support measures, taking into account the views of stakeholders, so as to further enhance the learning effectiveness of NCS students.

On the curriculum, we have developed the Supplementary Guide to the Chinese Language Curriculum for NCS Students (Supplementary Guide) and distributed a series of L&T materials to schools and NCS students to address the practical needs of NCS students in learning the Chinese Language. The Supplementary Guide, comprising four curriculum modes of "immersion in Chinese Language lessons", "bridging/transition", "specific learning purposes" and "integration", aims to cater for the diverse needs and aspirations of NCS students and support their learning of the Chinese Language at different stages of development.

Our strategy of providing multiple curriculum modes under a common curriculum framework is based on local pedagogical practices as well as experience of other places. Research findings have revealed that given support and duly empowered, NCS students can learn at a pace and achieve results on par with local students. An alternative curriculum and assessment with pre-set simpler contents and lower standards would limit the range of learning opportunities for NCS students with different needs and aspirations. In addition, the credibility of such qualifications in the eyes of the employers remains to be ascertained.

Apart from the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education, we are enhancing support for NCS students in obtaining internationally recognised qualifications that reflect more closely their standards in Chinese Language so as to facilitate their academic and career advancement. We have announced that starting from the 2012/13 school year the present arrangements for subsidising participation in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Chinese) Examination will be extended to cover the Chinese Language examinations of the International General Certificate of Secondary Education, General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary Level and GCE Advanced Level.

(d) To help EM young people pursue further studies and employment, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) not only offers a wide range of vocational training programmes, but has also set up a new Youth College, which came into operation in the 2012/13 school year, to provide more alternative articulation opportunities for post-

Secondary 3 students, with dedicated support services for NCS students. The VTC will also give priority to NCS applicants for admission to programmes of the new Youth College.

The Home Affairs Department (HAD) commissions non-governmental organisations to operate support service centres for EMs, which provide tailor-made learning classes, counselling, integration programmes and interpretation services. In addition, the HAD implements two pilot programmes under the Community Care Fund to provide subsidy for eligible non-school attending EMs from low-income families who take international public language examinations and designated language courses with a view to enhancing their education or employment opportunities and enabling their early integration into the community.

Separately, to more effectively address the training needs of EMs, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) also offers dedicated training courses which can enhance their employability and facilitate their integration into society. These dedicated courses include full-time placement-tied courses of various industries, as well as part-time and evening generic skills and "Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus" courses, which cater for the different needs of the unemployed and employed. When applying for the dedicated courses, EMs are not required to have a pass in Chinese Language in school or public examinations. In addition, the ERB provides EMs with a "Module Certificate in Employment Set Sail" course, which helps trainees know more about community resources, the local employment market, common and workplace Cantonese expressions, etc.

The Labour Department has also set up designated resource corners and special counters for EM job seekers at all job centres. Tailor-made employment briefings are organised to help them better understand the local labour market and improve their job search skills. EM job seekers can also join various employment programmes in accordance with their needs to receive personalised employment consultation services or participate in work trials in an actual work environment, which can help enhance their employability.

Note:

1. In the 2012/13 school year, there are 31 schools, including 10 secondary schools and 21 primary schools.

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