

Comment/ Letters

Hong Kong's non-Chinese-speaking students need better support from the Education Bureau

Rather than just encouraging schools, the bureau should develop usage guidelines and outcome-tracking metrics for funding to support these students

There is also an urgent need to develop a curriculum for Chinese as a second language



Letters

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Non-Chinese speaking students attend class at the Yuen Yuen Institute No. 3 Secondary School in Tseung Kwan O in January 2015. Photo: SCMP

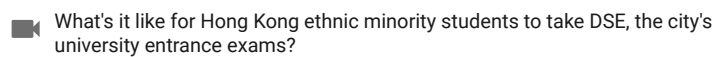
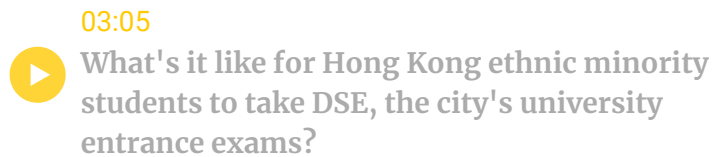
Last month, the Audit Commission released [a report](#) on the education support measures for [non-Chinese-speaking](#) (NCS) students. The findings are no surprise at all, but they ought to be a good reminder to the Education Bureau to enhance its public sector performance and accountability.

The report recommends the need to “encourage schools to make good use of the NCS Grant”. Hong Kong Unison believes mere encouragement is [not enough](#). The Education Bureau should take charge and develop grant-usage guidelines and outcome-tracking metrics to improve effectiveness of the grant.

Another long-time issue is the lack of training requirements for teachers teaching non-Chinese-speaking students and the low participation rate at Education Bureau training sessions. Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, in her [election manifesto](#) in 2017, asked the bureau to establish a professional ladder for primary and secondary schoolteachers who have acquired specialised skills in teaching Chinese as a second language. To date, such a policy is not in place.

I strongly recommend professional development be extended beyond teaching Chinese as a second language. It should enhance teachers' cultural and religious sensitivity and strengthen skills related to home-school cooperation with ethnic minority families.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to [develop a curriculum](#) for Chinese as a second language. Without a curriculum, it is difficult for teachers to develop teaching and learning materials even if they have attended professional teacher training.



The report also noted that the number of non-Chinese-speaking students nominated to the [student support programme](#) had decreased over the years. During Unison's outreach, many non-Chinese-speaking parents and students mentioned they were not aware of the programme, and those who attended said the programme did not help in Chinese learning.

Unison [research](#) in 2019 showed that almost 60 per cent of interviewed parents were not confident about putting their child in [mainstream primary schools](#) because they thought their child's Chinese ability was not high enough to enable a smooth transition. Out-of-school support measures are seen as important by ethnic minority parents as children need to keep up with the Chinese-language environment outside the classroom.

In the past few years, civil society, academics and statutory bodies have published different reports calling on the Education Bureau to proactively improve non-Chinese-speaking education-related policies and measures, but to no avail. I urge the bureau to take the commission's recommendations seriously and implement them without delay.

Phyllis Cheung, executive director, Hong Kong Unison