

# Promotion of Chinese Language Education and Career Planning for Non-Chinese Speaking Students

## Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission

### Purpose

This paper aims to outline the perspectives and recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on addressing educational challenges facing students from the ethnic communities, with a particular focus on Chinese language learning and career planning for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students. The recommendations build upon those presented in the 2019 “Closing the Gap” Report by the EOC’s Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities, as well as the suggestions made in the EOC’s 2024 Policy Address Submission under the same theme.

### Background

2. A range of measures has been put forward by the Government since 2014 for the education enhancement of NCS students, including increased funding for schools, introduction of the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework and setting-up of the Applied Learning (Chinese) Subjects under HKDSE Examination.

3. Recent enhancement initiatives covered diverse areas such as online self-learning resources, after-school Chinese language courses, Summer Bridging Programme, life planning support services, cross-school teacher learning communities, education programmes and resource for NCS parents, etc.

4. Substantial additional funding provided by the Government to support NCS students in schools<sup>1</sup> has yielded positive outcomes, including an increased number of schools enrolling NCS students<sup>2</sup> and a rise in the admission of NCS students to UGC-funded undergraduate degree programmes<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand,

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<sup>1</sup> Additional funding for public sector and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools to facilitate Chinese learning of NCS students and create an inclusive learning environment is estimated to be \$410 million in 2024/2025.

<sup>2</sup> According to the 2023/24 data from the Education Bureau, 68% kindergartens, 78% primary schools and 72% secondary schools in the public sector have admitted NCS students, 91 more kindergartens, 40 more primary schools and 23 more secondary schools than in 2018/19.

<sup>3</sup> The number of local NCS students admitted to UGC-funded undergraduate degree programmes (via JUPAS and non-JUPAS combined) increased from 233 in 2019/20 to 332 in 2023/24. Nevertheless, the proportion of

the limited proportion of NCS students taking mainstream Chinese examinations for university admission<sup>4</sup> underscores a continuing gap in Chinese language proficiency between NCS students and their ethnically Chinese peers, adversely impacting the employment and career prospects of the former group.

5. In 2019, the EOC conducted a review on the progress of the education measures implemented for NCS students and released the “Closing the Gap” Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities. Among the 22 recommendations made for improvement, some have been taken up by the Government, with others followed up in a 2024 policy submission. Suggestions on outstanding and emerging issues are summarized below:

### **Teaching and Learning**

6. A comprehensive Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum is imperative for closing the gap between NCS students’ Chinese proficiency and mainstream job requirements. The EOC reaffirms the suggestions of:

- Finalizing a Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum that includes specific pedagogy, teaching tools, assessments, qualifications, with textbooks available for all schools and all levels, supplemented by teaching guides and learning materials to cater to classroom diversity in Chinese levels among NCS students.
- Formalizing a dedicated coordinating role in schools and introduce a mandatory professional training system for teachers specializing in Chinese as a second language, including dedicated modules in pre-service teacher education (e.g., PGDE program) and longer in-service training, comparable to special educational needs teacher training and coordinator.
- Integrating technological aids such as AI tools, writing software, mobile apps, etc. and community mentors to cater to the diverse needs and learning stages of NCS students. This can be achieved by facilitating collaboration among schools, NGOs and technology providers to

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those admitted via JUPAS remains relatively low. For instance, among 1,272 NCS students who took the HKDSE Examination in 2023/24, only 146 got admitted through JUPAS, i.e. about 11%.

<sup>4</sup> Among 1,406 NCS Secondary 6 students in 2023/24, 72 entered for the HKDSE (Chinese Language) examination and 139 took Applied Learning Chinese (for NCS students) for HKDSE.

implement innovative, tailored digital and community resources effectively; and establishing a centralized platform to promote and disseminate these resources to schools.

### **Chinese Examination Options**

7. The EOC believes that the primary goal of the extensive support in place for NCS students is to enable them to attain mainstream Chinese proficiency level rather than switching prematurely to overseas curricula in early secondary school education. With this in mind, the EOC proposes:

- Adjusting the funding mechanisms so that resources can be shifted toward higher-level Chinese language learning, especially for HKDSE mainstream and Applied Learning (Chinese) subjects.
- Conducting a review on the curriculum and operational challenges of the Applied Learning (Chinese) pathway to enhance its attractiveness and viability as a qualification option for NCS students.
- Exploring assessment differentiation options in HKDSE Chinese examination, such as making classical or ancient Chinese texts an optional extended module to accommodate students' varying abilities; as well as non-overseas alternative Chinese examination options, such as Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK), for NCS students.
- Allowing the use of Chinese character input software during examinations, which reflects common digital workplace practices while still emphasizing writing skills.
- Forming a task force with diverse stakeholders to address systemic barriers deterring NCS students from taking mainstream Chinese examinations and to develop solutions.

## **Career Planning**

8. Recognizing that factors beyond Chinese literacy affect NCS students' education and career paths, including access to accurate career information, social resources, personal initiative, financial status and cultural stereotypes, the EOC highlights the need for:

- Strengthening guidance, training and resources for career teachers to provide timely, culturally responsive advice, helping students realistically assess their career needs and prepare accordingly, including ongoing language learning.
- Promoting mentorship programmes using young professionals and university students from diverse ethnic backgrounds to raise aspirations and provide relatable role models.
- Encouraging partnerships with local corporations to create professional internship opportunities for NCS students, enhancing real-world exposure and career development.

## **Additional Suggestions**

9. A longitudinal study commissioned by the Education Bureau on junior primary NCS students' Chinese learning is scheduled for completion in 2025. The EOC hopes its findings will provide valuable guidance for targeted improvement efforts. Furthermore, it is suggested that such empirical evaluation approach be extended to higher primary and secondary education levels, thereby helping to bridge the language proficiency gap for NCS students throughout their schooling journey.

10. At the school level, there is a growing commitment of schools to promoting racial inclusion on their campuses as reflected in the remarkable increase in schools participating the EOC's Racially Friendly Campus Recognition Scheme over the past three years. To sustain and deepen these efforts, the provision of comprehensive checklists, clear guidelines and well-defined benchmarks is essential. These structured tools are critical for expanding schools' focus beyond initial awareness towards embedding inclusive practices as integral parts of school culture and daily operations.

## **Conclusion**

11. As many non-ethnic Chinese individuals consider Hong Kong their home, improved language proficiency is crucial not only for learning and employment but also for fostering belonging and strengthening cultural ties. Closing the language proficiency gap for NCS students in Hong Kong is essential to ensure they do not feel inadequate and to level the playing field.

12. Coordinated and sustained efforts to address language and racial challenges will benefit not only these youth but also Hong Kong by expanding its talent pool. On top of that, enhancing Chinese language skills will empower non-ethnic Chinese youth to serve as vital connectors between their place of ethnic origin, Hong Kong, the Greater Bay Area and China. It is in full alignment with the strategic developmental goals of Hong Kong.

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