

Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities
Education for Children of Ethnic Minorities
12 December 2016

Submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission

Purpose of the Paper

This paper is supplementary to the previous submission from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) on 23 November 2016 regarding education for ethnic minority (EM) children for the Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities.

Submission from the EOC on 23 November 2016

2. In the last submission, the EOC has made the following recommendations to the Education Bureau (EDB):
 - a. Make clear the performance targets of the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework (“Learning Framework”) for evaluating its effectiveness, such as number of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students who have successfully bridged over to mainstream classes, etc.;
 - b. Undertake the development and publishing of appropriate teaching materials for NCS learners so that quality, quantity and adherence to the needs of the syllabus and curriculum can be ensured;

- c. Set clear targets to ensure that schools have a certain percentage of their teachers equipped with the formal training to cater to NCS students' needs; and
- d. Collect and release data in terms of number as well as ratio of EM student population in schools with high EM concentration and to keep track on reverse migration from mainstream to previously designated schools.

Supplementary View on the Learning Framework

3. According to the LC Paper No. CB(2)254/16-17(01), the EDB emphasized that “teachers may set progressive learning targets, learning progress and expected learning outcomes with the Learning Framework and use a “small-step” learning approach” to address the problem that “the starting points for NCS students differ and their learning progresses may vary”. The EOC is concerned about the effectiveness of this teaching strategy for those NCS students who join the local education system midway as well as those who have lagged behind significantly due to the lack of home environment for speaking Chinese. Even with the small-step approach, the learning of Chinese by NCS students from different background and ability is still a challenge for both the students and their teachers to close the gap in Chinese language level. In view that the Chinese language curriculum that the Learning Framework based on was developed for first language learners who are presumably proficient in Cantonese, the EDB needs to make it clear what additional second language learning strategies, beyond the “small-step” approach, the teachers should use to teach the NCS students who linger at the beginner stages. Suggestions from some experts in Chinese education the EOC has met include

teaching Cantonese pronunciation as the first step, grammar lessons on Chinese language structure, etc.

4. In gauging the appropriateness of the Learning Framework, one should also consider the testing or examinations. Students and teachers mention in particular the difficulty with the Chinese literature part of the DSE Chinese Examination Paper 1. With most Chinese language learners, both CS and NCS, struggling with this part that involves classical or ancient text, the EDB may need to review whether NCS learners can cope with this part of the curriculum given that it assumes a strong cultural context which may not be naturally accessible to non-native Chinese students. Possible options, such as making the Chinese literature or classical Chinese part in this paper optional for NCS students, should be explored, bearing in mind that they face a disadvantage in this area but at the same time without compromising on the objective of language acquisition and proficiency on par with Chinese students.

Supplementary View on the Teaching Materials

5. The existing teaching materials provided by the EDB for the teachers' reference are adapted from the materials developed by a few previously designated schools before the development and implementation of the Learning Framework. These materials are very useful accessory tools for sample exercises. However, as the curriculum designs in these materials were very much tailor-made for those particular schools with high concentration of NCS students, teachers from those schools with lower number of NCS students reflected that the materials are less applicable for their student profiles and they are left with no alternatives but create their own materials. Out of the above concerns, the EOC reiterated the teachers'

request and recommended the EDB to develop and publish more teaching materials, for example textbooks, to provide teachers with essential tools and guidance.

Additional View on the Formation of the Dedicated Unit for EM Education

6. In the LC Paper No. CB(2)254/16-17(01), the EDB stated that “priority should be accorded to the learning of the Chinese language and it would not be desirable to divert teachers’ efforts and resources to other areas.” However, EM students are also encountering other difficulties in their education:

- a. EM students with special educational needs (SEN) are facing double disadvantage. Firstly, due to the language barriers, EM students who are not native speakers of Chinese and English may not be diagnosed early or accurately and may often miss the opportune time for early intervention and support. Secondly, parents have repeatedly drawn to the EOC’s attention of the paucity of English-medium kindergartens and schools that can also cater to SEN children. They have no choice but to send their children to Chinese-medium schools, where the support measures for SEN students may not be appropriate for NCS students.
- b. Feedback received from the stakeholders points to the disadvantage that many NCS students are subjected to with respect to the subject of Liberal Studies. NCS students with low level of Chinese language proficiency will find this doubly hard as the subject requires knowledge of local and current affairs. Most of the local news is available largely in Chinese language media which is difficult for NCS students to access. For those schools with only a few students in S4-S6, the administrators also face the difficulties to arrange English-medium class for a small number of students.

7. In view of the above problems beyond the learning of Chinese but of equal weight of significance to the education of NCS students, the EDB is highly recommended to set up a dedicated unit looking into all education issues of NCS students in a comprehensive and holistic manner. This approach, similar to those taken in catering for the needs of SEN students, will definitely help many NCS students who are losing vital years of their education and development.

Equal Opportunities Commission

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