

# **Equal Opportunities Commission**

## **Submission for 2019 Policy Address Public Consultation**

### **Report of Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities**

#### **Purpose**

This paper aims to provide the views and recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) for the 2019 Policy Address on education for ethnic minorities (EMs) with particular emphasis on their learning of Chinese language. These views are consolidated from diverse feedback systematically collected from important stakeholders and are delineated in the annexed “Closing the Gap: Report of the Working Group on Education for Ethnic Minorities” (the “Report”).

#### **Background**

2. EMs have been facing systemic barriers in education. This issue was raised by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in their concluding observations in May 2014<sup>1</sup>; and the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination recommended in its concluding remarks in September 2018 that the Government, “[f]acilitate the smooth integration of non-Chinese speaking students in Hong Kong, China into the education system, and ensure that children of all ethnicities enjoy their right to inclusive and Chinese-language education.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Noting that education is an effective means of empowerment, EM education issues have long been a strategic priority area for EOC. A 2011 “Education for All” report was issued by our first Working Group on Education for EMs (the “Working Group”) and numerous subsequent submissions have been made to the Government and Legislative Council on improving EM students’ learning of Chinese language and integration in schools.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of China, including Hong Kong, China, and Macao, China*, 13 June 2014, E/C.12/CHN/CO/2, paragraph 52; available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/53c77e524.html>

<sup>2</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), *Concluding observations on the combined fourteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of China (including Hong Kong, China and Macao, China)\**, paragraph 24(c), available at <https://urlzs.com/92Roy>

4. As a result of calls by NGOs and other stakeholders as well as the EOC recommendations, the Education Bureau instituted some new measures in the 2014-15 school year, namely the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework (the “Learning Framework”) in primary and secondary education; Applied Learning (Chinese) subjects in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination and a tiered funding system for schools admitting non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, for the schools to provide additional support in the learning of Chinese language for EM students. In 2016, the Government extended its support measures to pre-school education. Under the Kindergarten Education Scheme, additional funding is allocated to kindergartens admitting eight or more NCS students to support their Chinese learning.

5. However, after more than three years of implementation of the enhanced support measures in primary and secondary schools, there are still uncertainties and inadequacies in the policies and measures, including unclear indicators for measuring the Learning Framework’s effectiveness and students’ progress, lack of suitable teaching materials, insufficient training for teachers, etc. In light of continued concerns with regards to EM education, the Working Group was reconvened with members from the EOC Board and outside experts in January 2018. Please refer to Appendix 1 of the annexed Report for the Working Group Membership list.

6. Over the course of a year and a quarter, the Working Group met with various stakeholders, including language experts, teachers, principals, NGOs, EM parents, NCS students and employers, to collect feedback. This was mainly done through discussions and the feedback is qualitative in nature. In total, 12 group sharing sessions, eight individual interviews and three school visits were conducted; and 170 stakeholders were met. For a summary of feedback from the stakeholder groups consulted, please refer to Appendix 2 of the annexed Report.

### **Major Concerns & Recommendations**

7. The Working Group concluded with the following eight areas of major concerns (please refer to P.10-19 of the annexed Report) :

- i. Gaps in the Learning Framework
- ii. Unclear indicators to measure the progress of the Learning Framework
- iii. Insufficient teacher training and support
- iv. Available Chinese examinations either too hard for second-language

- learners or too low in standard
  - v. Limited knowledge and access to information for EM parents on school choice and examination options for their children
  - vi. Need for more integration in schools
  - vii. Lack of continuing Chinese learning opportunities beyond secondary school
  - viii. Inadequate parental support and community support
8. Based on the above concerns, the Working Group made 22 recommendations to address the following three main issues (please refer to P.19-22 of the annexed Report):
- i. Equal opportunities for EM students in acquiring Chinese language proficiency as second-language learners
  - ii. Chinese language acquisition and qualifications for EM students to have equal opportunities in academic and career pursuits
  - iii. Racial integration in schools
9. Among these 22 recommendations, the top three priority areas for immediate consideration are:
- i. Plug the gaps in the current Chinese-as-a-second-language learning system to provide a complete curriculum for NCS students
  - ii. Strengthen teacher training to fully equip teachers with both skillset and mindset in teaching second-language learners
  - iii. Revisit the Chinese language examination options for second-language learners and structure these options into a qualification ladder and pathway

### **The Way Forward**

10. Implementation of some of the recommendations made in the Report may require more in-depth deliberation with the Government and different stakeholders to enlist their commitment and collaboration. However, many of the recommendations are reflections of long-held concerns and need speedy action. We hope the Government will pay serious attention to the concerns raised by stakeholders and our recommendations.

11. To conclude, every five years lost is one generation of students entering and exiting high school. Our interactions with the EM community have repeatedly thrown

up the same concerns and we sincerely recommend the Government to deploy substantial resources, i.e. money and expertise, to put in place an effective and purpose-built system to cater to the need. Clear and systematic implementation with schools, teachers, trainers and administration is equally important for the system to succeed.

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