

LCQ15: Learning of Chinese by non-Chinese speaking students

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (October 31):

Question:

Some ethnic minority (EM) groups have pointed out that learning Chinese can help EM people integrate into society. However, non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students have encountered difficulties in learning Chinese. As a result, their opportunities for further studies, employment as well as upward mobility are limited. The Education Bureau (EDB) has implemented since 2014 the "Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework" to step up the support for NCS students in learning Chinese. Besides, the Chief Executive has announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the Government will introduce new measures to allow NCS students to learn Chinese more effectively. Although the authorities have pointed out that the various support measures are gradually delivering results, and the number of schools which admit NCS students has been on the rise, there are still quite a number of complaints about schools' refusal to admit NCS students. Moreover, as the results generally achieved by NCS students in the subject of Chinese Language in public examinations are unsatisfactory, their rate of admission to local universities through the Joint University Programmes Admissions System is generally lower than that of Chinese speaking students. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of (i) secondary schools, (ii) primary schools and (iii) kindergartens which admitted NCS students in the past three school years, and set out in the table below a breakdown by District Council (DC) district;

DC District	2015/2016			2016/2017			2017/2018		
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(i)	(ii)	(iii)
...									
...									
...									
Total									

(2) of the respective numbers of requests for assistance or complaints about the learning of Chinese by NCS students that EDB received in the past three school years from (i) students, (ii) parents and (iii) schools (with a breakdown by type) and the major content of such requests or complaints; how EDB handled and followed up the cases;

(3) as I have received complaints that while most of the EM students, instead of taking the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination for Chinese Language, sit for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Chinese) Examination or examinations for other internationally recognised Chinese Language qualifications in which it is easier for them to get higher grades, the various tertiary institutions in Hong Kong have not published clear conversion tables in respect of the relevant academic results, resulting in such students being unable to assess whether their examination results meet the Chinese language proficiency requirements of the institutions, whether the authorities will explore improvement measures;

(4) whether the authorities will, in the long run, commission experts to design a Chinese as a Second Language Curriculum for both primary and secondary levels; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) whether the authorities will consider reforming the HKDSE Examination for Chinese Language (e.g. introducing a HKDSE examination paper dedicated for NCS students); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government is committed to encouraging and supporting the early integration of non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students (Note 1) (notably EM students) into the community, including facilitating their adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese language. In this connection, the Education Bureau (EDB) introduced a series of measures in 2014 to step up the support for NCS students to facilitate their learning of Chinese, including the implementation of the "Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework" (Learning Framework) in primary and secondary schools. The Learning Framework was drawn up in consultation with teachers and language experts and developed from the perspective of second language learners with a view to helping NCS students overcome the difficulties in learning Chinese. To facilitate the implementation of the Learning Framework and creation of an inclusive learning environment in schools, starting from the 2014/15 school year, EDB has also substantially increased the additional funding to schools to currently over \$200 million per year and provided schools with teaching resources, teacher training and professional support. All public sector schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools offering the local curriculum which admit 10 or more NCS students are provided with an additional funding ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million per year depending on the number of NCS students admitted. Schools admitting less than 10 NCS students may also apply for an additional funding on a need basis to offer after-school support programmes in learning Chinese to consolidate what their NCS students have learnt in an immersed Chinese language environment.

With the implementation of the enhanced support measures, the number of primary and secondary schools admitting NCS students has gradually increased

from about 590 in the 2013/14 school year to about 620 in the 2017/18 school year, which covers about two-thirds of the schools in the territory. Among them, the number of schools admitting 10 or more NCS students and hence provided with the abovementioned additional funding has increased by about 30 per cent in four years (from 173 in the 2014/15 school year to 228 in the 2017/18 school year) and the number of schools admitting less than 10 NCS students and provided with the additional funding has also substantially increased from 58 in the 2014/15 school year to 213 in the 2017/18 school year. This shows that the new support mode and measures have widened the school choices of parents of NCS students.

As announced in the 2018 Policy Address, the EDB will continue implementing the Learning Framework and monitoring its implementation. Moreover, the EDB will continue commissioning post-secondary institutions to provide school-based support services for kindergartens (KGs), primary and secondary schools admitting NCS students in the three school years from 2019/20 to 2021/22, so as to enhance the professional competency of teachers. In view of the learning needs of NCS students, the school-based curriculum, learning and teaching as well as assessment arrangements will also be adapted with reference to the Learning Framework, so as to allow these students to learn Chinese more effectively. Starting from the 2019/20 school year, the EDB will provide a five-tiered subsidy for KGs joining the KG Education Scheme based on the number of NCS students admitted so that these schools can provide more appropriate support for their NCS students, thereby assisting them in learning Chinese, fostering a diversified culture and building an inclusive environment.

Our reply to the question of the Hon Vincent Cheng is as follows:

(1) The Government ensures that all eligible children enjoy equal opportunities in admission to Primary One and Secondary One of public sector schools under the respective school places allocation systems. KGs are also reminded via channels including circulars and briefing sessions, etc. that their school-based admission mechanism should be fair, just and open, and in compliance with the existing legislation (including the anti-discrimination ordinances such as Race Discrimination Ordinance) as well as circulars and guidelines issued by the EDB, which include providing application forms in both Chinese and English. The numbers of KGs joining the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme/the KG Education Scheme and public sector and DSS primary and secondary schools with NCS students by district from the 2015/16 to 2017/18 school years are tabulated at Annex.

(2) The EDB did not receive any complaints lodged by students, parents or schools regarding NCS students' learning of the Chinese language from the 2015/16 to 2017/18 school years. On the other hand, stakeholders of schools contact the EDB through various means to enquire about different issues or request for assistance from time to time. The EDB will render appropriate assistance to the enquirers with reference to the nature and details of the issues. Statistics on such enquiries are not available.

(3) Eligible applicants, irrespective of their race and language spoken at

home, have equal opportunities to be admitted to post-secondary programmes. At present, for NCS applicants who meet the specified circumstances (Note 2), the participating institutions of the Joint University Programmes Admissions System (JUPAS) accept alternative Chinese Language qualifications, including those under the General Certificate of Education (GCE), General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), for the purpose of satisfying the entrance requirement in respect of Chinese Language. Besides, the Applied Learning Chinese (for NCS students) (ApL(C)) of the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) (Category B) is also accepted. All JUPAS participating-institutions have uploaded the accepted alternative Chinese Language qualifications, minimum grade required, and special requirements for alternative Chinese Language qualifications in respect of individual programmes onto the JUPAS website (www.jupas.edu.hk/en/page/detail/547/).

All post-secondary institutions enjoy autonomy in student admission. A merit-based principle is adopted by institutions in the admission of students. At present, institutions can flexibly handle the Chinese Language requirement for NCS students on a case-by-case basis. It is worth noting that applications from local NCS students and other applicants are subject to the same admission criteria. The major factors for consideration include academic performance, non-academic achievements, reference letters by school principals and performance in interviews/tests, etc.

(4) As NCS students regard Hong Kong as their home, it is imperative for them to be proficient in Chinese so as to be competitive in respect of further studies and career pursuits with a view to integrating into the local community. Therefore, the policy intent is to facilitate NCS students' bridging over to mainstream Chinese Language classes. It is not advisable to provide them with a simpler Chinese Language curriculum, which will limit their opportunities for Chinese learning in the long run. To this end, the EDB has developed, from the perspective of second language learners, the Learning Framework based on the mainstream Chinese Language curriculum and input from experts and academics. The Learning Framework has been implemented starting from the 2014/15 school year. With reference to the Learning Framework, teachers can set progressive learning targets, learning progress and expected learning outcomes in the reading, writing, listening and speaking domains so that their NCS students with diverse learning needs can learn Chinese progressively in a "small-step" approach.

The Learning Framework has been implemented since the 2014/15 school year. It takes time and teachers' effort to take root in schools. The EDB will continue to review the Learning Framework and the implementation of other support measures, and refine relevant measures where appropriate. We understand that learning Chinese is not easy and effective language learning is also based on multiple factors. Besides the curriculum, teaching and learning in schools, learning motivation of NCS students, study skills, time invested in learning Chinese, and parents' cooperation and expectation, etc. are also important factors which contribute to NCS students' mastery of the Chinese language.

(5) At present, the education policy intent is to facilitate NCS students' bridging over to mainstream Chinese Language classes, with a view to facilitating their mastery of Chinese to prepare them for further studies and career pursuits. Students, Chinese speaking or NCS students alike, are required to meet the admission requirements as they apply for programmes offered by local or overseas post-secondary institutions. If a separate paper with simpler contents and lower benchmarks is provided for NCS students in HKDSE (Chinese Language), it is neither conducive to enhancing their Chinese proficiency nor to increasing their opportunities for further studies. In respect of employment, different industries have different language proficiency requirements for their employees. Nevertheless, as Hong Kong is a Chinese society, NCS students have to attain a certain level of Chinese proficiency in the long run in order to stay competitive in the workplace. Similarly, introducing a separate public examination or paper in HKDSE (Chinese Language) for NCS students cannot increase their employment opportunities. Instead, this will possibly delay the problem until the job-seeking stage or even limit their career development in different industries in the future. Therefore, the EDB has no such plans.

On the other hand, in view of the fact that NCS students at senior levels may have learned Chinese for a varying period of time and some NCS students who have a late start in learning Chinese may encounter greater difficulties, starting from the 2014/15 school year, ApL(C) has been introduced at the senior secondary levels to provide NCS students with an additional channel to obtain an alternative Chinese Language qualification to prepare them for further studies and career pursuits. Besides, eligible NCS students (Note 2) are provided with subsidy to obtain internationally recognised alternative Chinese Language qualifications, including those under GCSE, IGCSE and GCE for admission to the University Grants Committee-funded universities and post-secondary institutions.

Note 1: For the planning of educational support measures, students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese are broadly categorised as NCS students.

Note 2: The NCS students concerned are those who meet the following circumstances:

- (a) have learnt Chinese Language for less than six years while receiving primary and secondary education; or
- (b) have learnt Chinese Language for six years or more in schools, but have been taught an adapted and simpler curriculum not normally applicable to the majority of students in local schools.