

CHAPTER 2

Education Bureau

Education support measures for non-Chinese speaking students

**Audit Commission
Hong Kong
31 March 2021**

This audit review was carried out under a set of guidelines tabled in the Provisional Legislative Council by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee on 11 February 1998. The guidelines were agreed between the Public Accounts Committee and the Director of Audit and accepted by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Report No. 76 of the Director of Audit contains 7 Chapters which are available on our website at <https://www.aud.gov.hk>

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EDUCATION SUPPORT MEASURES FOR NON-CHINESE SPEAKING STUDENTS

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EDUCATION SUPPORT MEASURES FOR NON-CHINESE SPEAKING STUDENTS

Executive Summary

1. The Education Bureau (EDB) refers to students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese as non-Chinese speaking students (NCS students). In the period from school year 2015/16 to school year 2019/20 (other than calendar years, all years (e.g. 2015/16) mentioned in this Audit Report refer to school years), there was an increasing trend in the number of NCS students. The total number of NCS students attending kindergartens under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme or the kindergarten education scheme, public sector primary schools, secondary schools and special schools, and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools increased by 2,908 (12.6%) from 23,021 to 25,929. The number of NCS students as a percentage of all students increased from 3.0% to 3.4%.

2. Since 2014/15, EDB has introduced a series of enhanced measures to support NCS students' effective learning of Chinese language. In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, the expenditure on the education support measures for NCS students increased by \$211.8 million (87%) from \$244.5 million to \$456.3 million. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of EDB's education support measures for NCS students.

Funding support to schools

3. *Delays in submission of school plans and school reports.* To enhance the support for NCS students, EDB provides eligible schools with enhanced additional funding support for NCS students (NCS Grant). To ensure the proper and effective use of NCS Grant, schools are required to submit to EDB a school plan and a school report on the deployment of the Grant and the support measures every year. Audit found that in 2018/19: (a) of the 152 kindergartens receiving the Grant, 60 (39%) submitted their school plans late (including 18 kindergartens with delays of more than one month) and 73 (48%) submitted their school reports late (including 18 kindergartens with delays of more than one month); and (b) of the 266 primary, secondary and special schools receiving the Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million, 168 (63%) submitted their school plans late (including 26 schools with

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delays of more than one month) and 176 (66%) submitted their school reports late (including 40 schools with delays of more than one month) (paras. 2.2, 2.7 and 2.8).

4. ***Need to encourage schools to make good use of NCS Grant.*** NCS Grant was first provided to primary, secondary and special schools in 2014/15 and to kindergartens in 2017/18. Audit found that: (a) there were kindergartens that utilised less than half of the Grant provided, accounting for 10% (15 of 149 kindergartens) in 2017/18 and 3% (5 of 152 kindergartens) in 2018/19. Of the 137 kindergartens that were provided with the Grant in both years, 20 (15%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the two-year period; (b) in each school year during the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19, there were primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant of \$50,000 that utilised less than half of the Grant provided, ranging from 24% (21 of 88 schools) in 2015/16 to 36% (69 of 193 schools) in 2016/17. Of the 41 schools that were provided with the Grant in all the years over the five-year period, 7 (17%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the whole period, including 3 (7%) that utilised less than half of the total amount; and (c) in each school year during the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19, there were primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million that utilised less than half of the Grant provided, improving from 13% (26 of 196 schools) in 2014/15 to 4% (10 of 266 schools) in 2018/19. Of the 184 schools that were provided with the Grant in all the years over the five-year period, 2 (1%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the whole period (para. 2.11).

5. ***Need to improve timeliness of supervisory visits to schools.*** EDB conducts supervisory visits to all kindergartens receiving NCS Grant and primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million to monitor the schools' use of the Grant. Audit found that of the 283 primary, secondary and special schools that first received the Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million in any school year in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19, 44 (15%) were neither visited by EDB in the school year they first received the Grant nor visited in the following two school years. By the end of 2019/20, 26 (9%) schools, which were special schools, had not yet been visited by EDB (paras. 2.14 to 2.16).

6. ***Need to improve coverage of feedback collected.*** To review the implementation of support measures for NCS students by schools, EDB collected on a yearly basis, through questionnaires, feedback from major stakeholders of the primary and secondary schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million. In 2019/20, there were 433 kindergartens and 52 special schools

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admitting NCS students. Audit found that the questionnaire survey did not cover kindergartens and special schools (paras. 2.21 and 2.23).

Capacity building for teachers

7. *Need to consider setting professional development requirements.* EDB had not set training requirements for primary, secondary and special schools on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language. In 2019/20, there were 988 primary, secondary and special schools (with or without NCS students), and 13,794 teachers teaching Chinese Language at these schools. Audit analysed the hours of training provided by EDB to these teachers in the period from 2014/15 to 2019/20 on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language. Audit found that: (a) of the 988 schools, 252 (26%) did not have teachers who had attended EDB's training during the period. Of the 252 schools, 157 (62%) had NCS students. Of the 157 schools, 4 (3%) had 10 or more NCS students. The total number of NCS students in the 157 schools each year during the period ranged from 231 to 277; and (b) of the 13,794 teachers teaching Chinese Language in the 988 schools, 9,986 (72%) did not attend EDB's training during the period. Among the remaining 3,808 teachers who attended training, the number of training hours attended by many of them was on the low side. For instance, 1,744 (46%) of the 3,808 teachers attended training for 5 hours or less (para. 3.3).

8. *Need to review the way forward for the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language).* In 2014/15, the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) (PEG Scheme) was launched on a pilot basis. The pilot run of the Scheme has been extended twice until the end of 2021/22 with enhanced incentives. Audit noted that there had been only 99 applications received for the Scheme since its launch in 2014/15. As at end of October 2020, 89 of the 99 teachers had been approved under the Scheme to undertake structured part-time training programmes, representing only 20% of the maximum number of 450 teachers that the Scheme aimed to support (paras. 3.9 and 3.10).

9. *Need to encourage schools to critically review their development needs and make good use of school-based support services.* EDB provides school-based support services (SBSS) to help teachers cater for the needs of NCS students in learning Chinese. The duration of support services is normally one year. Every year, schools can apply for the relevant SBSS according to development needs of their

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teachers. Audit found that schools with NCS students were not very keen to apply for SBSS. In the period from 2014/15 to 2019/20: (a) each school year, there were 106 to 142 schools that received SBSS, representing only 10% to 14% of the total number of schools with NCS students; (b) of the 723 schools with NCS students every year throughout the period, 438 (61%) did not receive any SBSS; and (c) among the 438 schools, many had NCS students accounting for more than 10% of the total number of students in the schools (paras. 3.15 and 3.17).

Other support measures

10. ***Student Support Programme.*** Since 2007, EDB has commissioned a tertiary institution to operate the Student Support Programme for NCS students. The institution supports NCS students who are less proficient in Chinese by offering remedial programmes for these students after school hours or during holidays (para. 4.2). Audit found the following issues:

- (a) ***Decrease in the number of schools nominating NCS students and the number of NCS students nominated.*** In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, the number of schools nominating NCS students to enrol in the Programme decreased by 48 (38%) from 128 to 80 and the number of NCS students nominated decreased by 217 (22%) from 974 to 757 (para. 4.3);
- (b) ***Need to improve drop-out rate and attendance rate of students.*** In the period from 2016/17 to 2018/19, of the 2,195 NCS students enrolled in the Programme, 437 (20%) dropped out. Students enrolled in the Programme were divided into about 50 study groups. In each school year, there were 15 to 21 (i.e. 32% to 45%) study groups which had average attendance rates at or below 60% (paras. 4.5 and 4.6);
- (c) ***Need to ensure that students are arranged into study groups according to their learning needs.*** Although NCS students in the same school level may have different Chinese language competencies and learning needs, NCS students enrolled in the Programme are divided into study groups according to school levels. Each school year in the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, around 51% to 57% of the students found that the study materials used in their study groups were not at the appropriate level of difficulty for them (paras. 4.8 and 4.9); and

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- (d) *Need to improve course instructors' performance and students' performance.* EDB conducts lesson observations to monitor the Programme. Course instructors' performance and students' performance are rated by EDB staff on a scale of 1 to 4. The higher is the rating, the better is the performance. In the period from 2017/18 to 2018/19, EDB conducted lesson observations on 42 study groups. Of the 42 study groups, course instructors' performance was rated "1" and "2" in 2 (5%) and 18 (43%) study groups respectively and students' performance was rated "1" and "2" in 3 (7%) and 14 (33%) study groups respectively. Audit noted that there were deficiencies in course instructors' performance/students' performance in some study groups even though their performance was rated "2" (i.e. "satisfactory") (paras. 4.11 to 4.13).

11. *Need to improve participation rate of Summer Bridging Programme.* Since 2004, primary schools have been invited to run the Summer Bridging Programme during the summer vacation before NCS students start their Primary 1. Since 2007, the Programme has been extended to cover NCS students progressing to Primary 2 to 4. In the period from 2013 to 2019: (a) although the number of NCS students eligible to participate in the Programme increased by 1,226 (22%) from 5,602 to 6,828, the number of NCS students participating in the Programme decreased by 590 (34%) from 1,730 to 1,140; and (b) the participation rate (i.e. number of NCS students participating in the Programme as a percentage of the number of eligible students) was low and decreased continuously from 31% to 17% (paras. 4.16 and 4.18).

12. *Need to endeavour to fulfil the needs of schools and NCS students for life planning education services.* EDB commissioned a non-governmental organisation to implement a pilot project in the period from 2015/16 to 2017/18 to provide life planning education services to NCS students. Starting from 2018/19, EDB has regularised the services. Audit found that in the period from 2018/19 to 2020/21: (a) invitations of quotation were sent to the same five service providers every year; (b) the responses from the service providers were lukewarm; (c) the numbers of schools and NCS students applying for on-site support services on life planning education increased by 19 (112%) from 17 to 36 and by 499 (157%) from 318 to 817 respectively; and (d) due to the limited capacity of the service provider, the numbers of schools and NCS students with unsuccessful applications each year ranged from 7 to 20 and 121 to 497 respectively. The percentages of schools and NCS students with unsuccessful applications each year ranged from 30% to 56% and 35% to 61% respectively (paras. 4.25 to 4.27).

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13. *Need to improve the disclosure of admission criteria.* In the first stage (i.e. the Discretionary Places stage) of the Secondary School Places Allocation System, each student may apply to not more than two secondary schools. EDB requires secondary schools to make public prior to admission the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion. However, it does not require them to disclose such information in both Chinese and English. In January 2021, Audit examined the websites of 52 secondary schools and found that: (a) 15 (29%) schools had made public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion only in Chinese but not in English; and (b) 4 (8%) schools, while making public such information in both Chinese and English, had the icon directing to the English webpage shown in Chinese only (para. 4.36).

14. *Need to monitor the implementation of support measures.* In June and July 2017, in the papers submitted to the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council reporting the progress on the implementation of support measures for NCS students in learning Chinese, EDB stated that it would evaluate the effectiveness of the support measures to ensure the quality of these measures and refine individual measures as appropriate. In March 2021, EDB informed Audit that it had been collecting information to monitor the implementation of the support measures and making refinements in an ongoing manner. Audit considers that EDB needs to take on board the observations and recommendations of this Audit Report, and continue to monitor the implementation of the support measures for NCS students and make refinements as necessary (paras. 4.41 and 4.43).

Audit recommendations

15. **Audit recommendations are made in the respective sections of this Audit Report. Only the key ones are highlighted in this Executive Summary. Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education should:**

Funding support to schools

- (a) **take further measures to ensure that schools submit their school plans and school reports on the deployment of NCS Grant and the support measures in a more timely manner (para. 2.12(a));**

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- (b) **step up monitoring of the utilisation of NCS Grant by schools and encourage schools with unjustified underspending to make good use of the Grant (para. 2.12(b));**
- (c) **arrange supervisory visits to schools receiving NCS Grant in a more timely manner (para. 2.19);**
- (d) **strengthen measures to ensure that feedback from major stakeholders of kindergartens and special schools is collected and taken into consideration in formulating support measures for NCS students (para. 2.24);**

Capacity building for teachers

- (e) **consider the need to set appropriate training requirements for primary, secondary and special school Chinese Language teachers on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language (para. 3.7);**
- (f) **review the way forward for PEG Scheme (para. 3.13);**
- (g) **step up efforts in assisting schools in their review on the needs for capacity building for their teachers and encouraging schools to make good use of SBSS (para. 3.23(a));**

Other support measures

- (h) **promote the Student Support Programme to NCS students and schools (para. 4.14(a));**
- (i) **improve the drop-out rate and the attendance rate of the Student Support Programme (para. 4.14(b));**
- (j) **ensure that students enrolled in the Student Support Programme are arranged into study groups of appropriate levels (para. 4.14(c));**
- (k) **improve the course instructors' performance and students' performance to enhance the effectiveness of the Student Support Programme (para. 4.14(d));**

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- (l) **step up efforts in encouraging schools to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Summer Bridging Programme (para. 4.23(a));**
- (m) **endeavour to increase the capacity in the provision of on-site support services on life planning education (para. 4.29(b));**
- (n) **encourage secondary schools to make public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion for the Discretionary Places stage of the Secondary School Places Allocation System in both Chinese and English (para. 4.38(c)); and**
- (o) **take on board the observations and recommendations of this Audit Report, and continue to monitor the implementation of the support measures for NCS students and make refinements as necessary (para. 4.44).**

Response from the Government

16. The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 This PART describes the background to the audit and outlines the audit objectives and scope.

Background

1.2 The Education Bureau (EDB) refers to students whose spoken language at home is not Chinese as non-Chinese speaking students (NCS students) (Note 1). EDB encourages and supports the integration of NCS students into the community, including facilitating their early adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese language.

1.3 In the period from school year 2015/16 to school year 2019/20 (Note 2), there was an increasing trend in the number of NCS students. The total number of NCS students attending kindergartens under the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme or the kindergarten education scheme (KG Scheme) (Note 3), public sector primary schools, secondary schools and special schools, and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools increased by 2,908 (12.6%) from 23,021 in 2015/16 to 25,929 in 2019/20. The number of NCS students as a percentage of all students increased from 3.0% to 3.4% (see Table 1). Figure 1 shows the number of NCS students in 2019/20 analysed by ethnicity.

Note 1: *The scope of this Audit Report covers EDB's education support measures for NCS students studying in kindergartens joining the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme/kindergarten education scheme, public sector primary schools, secondary schools and special schools (i.e. government schools, aided schools and caput schools), and Direct Subsidy Scheme schools.*

Note 2: *Other than calendar years, all years (e.g. 2015/16) mentioned in this Audit Report refer to school years. The school years for kindergartens start in August/September and end in July/August of the following year. The school years for primary schools, secondary schools and special schools start in September and end in August of the following year.*

Note 3: *In 2007/08, EDB introduced the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme, under which parents were provided with direct fee subsidy, in the form of vouchers, to ease their financial burden and enhance their choice of kindergartens. In 2017/18, EDB replaced the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme by KG Scheme, under which subsidies have been directly provided to kindergartens.*

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Table 1

**Increasing numbers of NCS students
(2015/16 to 2019/20)**

Schools	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	Change between 2015/16 and 2019/20
Kindergartens						
No. of NCS students	4,918	5,165	5,274	5,313	5,622	+704
No. of all students	139,127	141,127	138,771	132,960	132,823	-6,304
No. of NCS students as a percentage of all students	3.5%	3.7%	3.8%	4.0%	4.2%	+0.7 percentage point
Primary schools						
No. of NCS students	8,958	9,311	9,622	9,849	10,051	+1,093
No. of all students	288,126	297,808	309,047	317,650	317,008	+28,882
No. of NCS students as a percentage of all students	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	3.2%	+0.1 percentage point
Secondary schools						
No. of NCS students	8,782	8,990	9,383	9,481	9,821	+1,039
No. of all students	329,757	314,965	307,105	301,026	302,175	-27,582
No. of NCS students as a percentage of all students	2.7%	2.9%	3.1%	3.1%	3.3%	+0.6 percentage point
Special schools						
No. of NCS students	363	367	390	401	435	+72
No. of all students	7,703	7,682	7,826	7,939	8,201	+498
No. of NCS students as a percentage of all students	4.7%	4.8%	5.0%	5.1%	5.3%	+0.6 percentage point
Overall						
No. of NCS students	23,021	23,833	24,669	25,044	25,929	+2,908
No. of all students	764,713	761,582	762,749	759,575	760,207	-4,506
No. of NCS students as a percentage of all students	3.0%	3.1%	3.2%	3.3%	3.4%	+0.4 percentage point

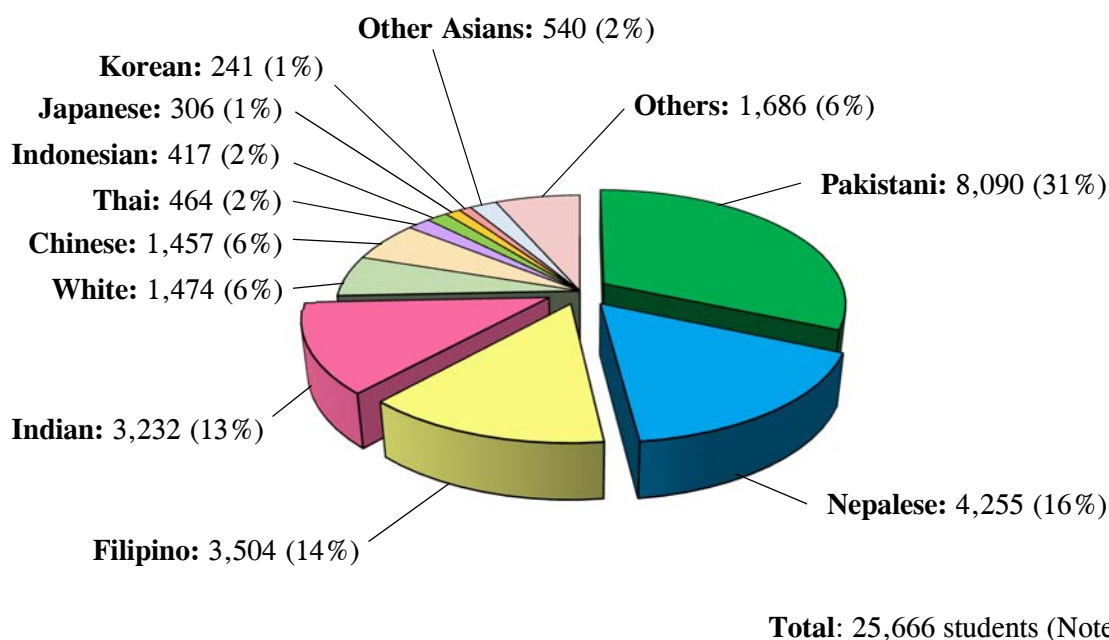
Source: Audit Commission analysis of EDB records

Remarks:

- (a) The figures were collected by EDB through the Enrolment Survey. The number of students reflected the position as at mid-September of the respective school years.
- (b) The figures only included NCS students studying in kindergartens joining the Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme/KG Scheme, public sector primary schools, secondary schools and special schools, and DSS schools.

Figure 1

**Numbers of NCS students analysed by ethnicity
(2019/20)**



Source: Audit Commission analysis of EDB records

Note: The number of kindergarten NCS students included in this Figure were all NCS students enrolled in the whole school year, whereas other NCS students included in this Figure reflected the position as at mid-September. The small difference between the total number of NCS students in this Figure and that in Table 1 was due to: (a) all NCS students included in Table 1 reflected the position as at mid-September; and (b) NCS students in this Figure included those in DSS schools offering the local curriculum whereas Table 1 included NCS students in all DSS schools.

1.4 With the objective of enhancing the education support measures for NCS students and facilitating NCS students' learning of the Chinese language, and after balancing the views of different stakeholders, including NCS students, their parents and the school sector, EDB revised in 2013/14 the mode of support to schools admitting NCS students and abolished the "designated schools" system. Before 2013/14, annual additional funding was only provided to schools that:

- (a) admitted a critical mass of NCS students;
- (b) had experience in taking care of NCS students; and

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- (c) were ready to partner with EDB to develop school-based support measures and share experience with other schools (Note 4).

1.5 Since 2014/15, EDB has introduced a series of enhanced measures to support NCS students' effective learning of Chinese language. Major support measures are:

- (a) ***Funding support to schools.*** Based on the number of NCS students admitted, additional funding is provided/made available for application starting from 2014/15 for all public sector schools and DSS schools offering the local curriculum with an aim to facilitate the implementation of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” (Learning Framework — Note 5) and the creation of an inclusive learning environment. Schools are required to set learning targets and adopt diversified intensive learning and teaching modes, such as pull-out learning, split-class/group learning and after-school consolidation, etc., where appropriate with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of NCS students in learning the Chinese language. Schools may also deploy the additional funding to appoint assistants of diverse races and procure professional services such as translation services to strengthen communication with parents of NCS students and organise multi-cultural activities. In addition, with the implementation of KG Scheme starting from 2017/18, a grant comparable to the salary of one kindergarten teacher has been provided to kindergartens joining KG Scheme and admitting eight or more NCS students. Starting from 2019/20, as an enhanced measure, a 5-tiered grant has been provided to kindergartens joining KG Scheme according to the number of NCS students admitted. Kindergartens joining KG Scheme are required to strengthen support for their NCS students, including

Note 4: *2013/14 was a transition year, in which support to schools was provided not under the “designated schools” system nor the new mode. In that year, all schools admitting 10 or more NCS students were provided with an additional funding ranging from \$300,000 to \$600,000.*

Note 5: *The Learning Framework provides a systematic set of objectives and expected learning outcomes that describes the learning progress of NCS students at different learning stages. Teachers may set progressive learning targets, learning progress and expected learning outcomes using a “small-step” learning approach to enhance the learning effectiveness of NCS students.*

supporting them in learning Chinese language, fostering a diversified culture and building an inclusive environment;

- (b) ***Capacity building for teachers.*** To build professional capacity for teachers in teaching NCS students, EDB has implemented the following support measures:
- (i) ***Professional development for teachers.*** EDB organises various modes of professional development programmes and arranges experience sharing activities. They cover topics such as curriculum planning, and learning and teaching strategies for NCS students' learning of Chinese language. In addition, the Standing Committee on Language Education and Research (SCOLAR) launched the Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language) (PEG Scheme — Note 6) in 2014/15. For kindergartens, EDB commissions tertiary institutions to organise courses on support for NCS students' learning of Chinese in kindergartens; and
- (ii) ***School-based support services (SBSS).*** EDB provides SBSS on enhancing teachers' professional capacity for supporting NCS students to learn Chinese. Measures under SBSS help participating primary, secondary and special schools adapt their school-based Chinese Language curriculum and develop appropriate learning and teaching materials, as well as build professional learning communities and facilitate experience sharing among schools. EDB has also commissioned tertiary institutions to provide SBSS for schools. Each year, schools may apply for SBSS for the year according to their development needs; and
- (c) ***Other support measures.*** EDB has implemented a number of other support measures for NCS students. Examples include:
- (i) ***Student Support Programme.*** EDB has commissioned a tertiary institution to run a number of centres to operate the Student Support

Note 6: *The Scheme was funded by the Language Fund, which was established in 1994 to enhance the Chinese (including Putonghua) and English language proficiency of the people of Hong Kong through funding a wide range of initiatives for students, the workforce and the general public.*

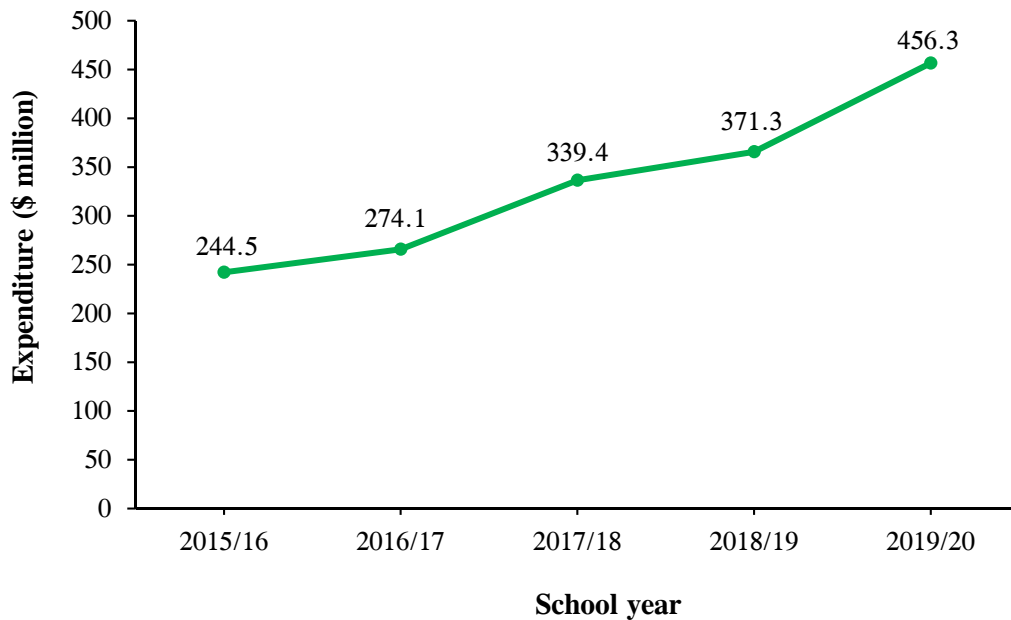
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Programme for NCS students. The centres support NCS students who are less proficient in Chinese by offering remedial programmes for them after school hours or during holidays; and

- (ii) ***Summer Bridging Programme.*** EDB invites primary schools to run the Summer Bridging Programme during the summer vacation to facilitate upcoming Primary 1 NCS students' adaptation to the classroom setting with the use of the Chinese language and help NCS students progress to Primary 2 to 4.

In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, the expenditure on the education support measures for NCS students increased by \$211.8 million (87%) from \$244.5 million to \$456.3 million (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

**Expenditure on education support measures for NCS students
(2015/16 to 2019/20)**

Source: Audit Commission analysis of EDB records

Remarks: The figures excluded some manpower resources and expenses subsumed under the overall expenditure of EDB and/or different funds.

1.6 Various teams of EDB are responsible for the provision of education support measures to NCS students. Appendix A is an organisation chart (extract) showing these teams as at 31 December 2020.

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Audit review

1.7 In October 2020, the Audit Commission (Audit) commenced a review of EDB's education support measures for NCS students. This audit review has focused on the following areas:

- (a) funding support to schools (PART 2);
- (b) capacity building for teachers (PART 3); and
- (c) other support measures (PART 4).

Audit has found room for improvement in the above areas and has made a number of recommendations to address the issues.

General response from the Government

1.8 The Secretary for Education on the whole agrees with the audit recommendations. He has said that EDB appreciates Audit's efforts in examining the education support measures for NCS students, making balanced observations and positive recommendations. EDB will continue to monitor the implementation of the support measures for NCS students and make refinements as necessary.

Acknowledgement

1.9 During the audit review, in light of the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the Government had implemented various special work arrangements and targeted measures for government employees, including working from home. Audit would like to acknowledge with gratitude the full cooperation of the staff of EDB during the course of the audit review amid the COVID-19 epidemic.

PART 2: FUNDING SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS

2.1 This PART examines EDB's provision of funding support to schools, focusing on the following areas:

- (a) use of funding by schools (paras. 2.4 to 2.13);
- (b) supervisory visits to schools (paras. 2.14 to 2.20); and
- (c) feedback from stakeholders (paras. 2.21 to 2.25).

Background

2.2 To enhance the support for NCS students in learning the Chinese language and the creation of an inclusive learning environment in schools, EDB provides eligible schools with enhanced additional funding support for NCS students (NCS Grant):

- (a) ***Kindergartens.*** Starting from 2017/18, kindergartens joining KG Scheme are eligible for NCS Grant according to the requirements in the respective school years. In 2017/18 and 2018/19, a grant comparable to the annual salary of one basic-rank kindergarten teacher (based on the mid-point of the salary range) was provided per year to kindergartens admitting eight or more NCS students to support NCS students. Starting from 2019/20, a 5-tiered grant ranging from \$50,000 to an amount comparable to the annual salary of two basic-rank kindergarten teachers is provided per year to kindergartens according to the number of NCS students admitted (see Table 2);

Table 2

Amount of NCS Grant for kindergartens
(2019/20)

No. of NCS students admitted	Amount of Grant (\$)
1 – 4	50,000
5 – 7	198,960
8 – 15	397,920
16 – 30	596,880
≥ 31	795,840

Source: EDB records

- (b) **Primary and secondary schools.** Starting from 2014/15, all public sector primary and secondary schools and DSS primary and secondary schools offering the local curriculum and admitting 10 or more NCS students are provided with a 5-tiered grant ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million per year according to the number of NCS students admitted. Schools admitting 1 to 9 NCS students might apply to EDB for a grant of \$50,000 per year on a need basis for organising after-school support programmes in learning the Chinese language for their NCS students (Note 7) (see Table 3); and
- (c) **Special schools.** Starting from 2014/15, in addition to the number of NCS students admitted, the amount of NCS Grant provided to special

Note 7: Since 2020/21, all schools admitting a relatively small number of NCS students (i.e. 1 to 9 NCS students for ordinary schools and 1 to 5 NCS students for special schools) have been provided with a new 2-tiered subsidy instead. Application for the funding is not required.

schools also depends on whether there are any NCS students taking an ordinary school curriculum (Note 8) (see Table 3):

- (i) *Special schools admitting 1 to 5 NCS students.* These schools might apply for a grant of \$50,000 per year on a need basis for organising after-school support programmes in learning the Chinese language for their NCS students (see Note 7 to para. 2.2(b));
- (ii) *Special schools admitting 6 to 9 NCS students with NCS students taking an ordinary school curriculum.* A grant of \$650,000 is provided per year to each school;
- (iii) *Special schools admitting 10 or more NCS students with NCS students taking an ordinary school curriculum.* Same as ordinary primary and secondary schools offering local curriculum and admitting 10 or more NCS students, the amount of grant is determined by the 5-tiered funding mechanism (see (b) above); and
- (iv) *Special schools admitting 6 or more NCS students without any NCS students taking an ordinary school curriculum.* A grant of \$650,000 is provided per year to each school.

Note 8: *Under the principle of “One Curriculum Framework for All”, a special school adopts the Hong Kong School Curriculum Framework to develop a school-based curriculum relevant to the learning capabilities and characteristics of its students. Some students in special schools (e.g. students with intellectual disability) do not pursue an ordinary curriculum and do not go through ordinary assessments and examinations. They are provided with an individualised education programme tailored by their teachers.*

Funding support to schools

Table 3

**Amount of NCS Grant for primary, secondary and special schools
(2014/15 to 2019/20)**

No. of NCS students admitted	Amount of Grant		
	Primary and secondary schools (\$)	Special schools	
		With NCS students taking an ordinary school curriculum (\$)	Without NCS students taking an ordinary school curriculum (\$)
1 – 5	50,000	50,000	
6 – 9		0.65 million	0.65 million
10 – 25	0.80 million		
26 – 50	0.95 million		
51 – 75	1.10 million		
76 – 90	1.25 million		
≥91	1.50 million		

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

2.3 In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, the total amount of NCS Grant provided to eligible schools increased by \$170.2 million (76%) from \$224.0 million to \$394.2 million. The number of eligible schools that received NCS Grant increased by 625 (199%) from 314 to 939.

Use of funding by schools

2.4 According to EDB's guidelines, the ambit of NCS Grant comprises:

- (a) enhancing the support for NCS students' learning of the Chinese language; and

- (b) creating an inclusive learning environment in schools, including strengthening the communication with parents of NCS students and home-school cooperation.

2.5 EDB has provided schools with examples of uses of NCS Grant within the ambit:

- (a) appointing additional Chinese Language teachers/teaching assistants in primary and secondary schools to implement various intensive learning and teaching modes for NCS students (Note 9) to strengthen their learning of the Chinese language, and appointing additional teachers/teaching assistants in kindergartens to support NCS students' learning of Chinese through an integrated thematic approach;
- (b) appointing assistants and/or additional teaching staff to strengthen the communication with NCS students and their parents;
- (c) procuring professional services such as procuring services from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise after-school Chinese learning programmes/activities which promote cultural integration and procuring translation services (e.g. translating school circulars or important matters on school webpages); and
- (d) organising activities or training to enhance teachers' cultural and religious sensitivity.

2.6 Primary, secondary and special schools provided with NCS Grant are also required to assign a dedicated teacher or a dedicated team (Note 10) to coordinate matters relating to the provision of support measures for NCS students.

Note 9: *Examples of modes of learning activities are: (a) pull-out learning; (b) split-class or group learning during Chinese Language lessons; and (c) after-school Chinese learning support.*

Note 10: *Kindergartens joining KG Scheme can flexibly deploy the resources to support NCS students' learning of Chinese through an integrated thematic approach. They are advised to assign a dedicated teacher or a dedicated team to coordinate matters relating to the provision of support measures for NCS students.*

Funding support to schools

Delays in submission of school plans and school reports

2.7 To ensure the proper and effective use of NCS Grant by schools, EDB requires schools to plan their support measures for NCS students early and review the measures on an ongoing basis. Every year, schools are required to submit to EDB a school plan and a school report on the deployment of the Grant and the support measures, summarising the implementation and the evaluation on the effectiveness of the measures:

- (a) ***Kindergartens.*** A kindergarten is required to submit the school plan by the end of September and the school report by the end of August in the following year;
- (b) ***Primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant of \$50,000.*** Schools may apply for NCS Grant of \$50,000 on a need basis when deemed necessary throughout the school year. Therefore, EDB has not specified a common deadline for submission of school plans. A school is required to submit the school plan along with the application for the funding. The school report is required to be submitted by the end of November in the following school year; and
- (c) ***Primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million.*** A school is required to submit the school plan of the current school year and the school report of the previous school year (if applicable) by the end of November.

EDB will review the school plans and the school reports submitted by schools to assess their planned and actual uses of NCS Grant and the support measures as provided by the schools to their NCS students with the use of NCS Grant. Based on the results of the reviews, EDB will provide professional advice and support to schools on their planning and implementation of support measures for NCS students where necessary. Schools are reminded by EDB to submit the documents before the respective deadlines.

2.8 According to EDB, the submission of the school plans and the school reports from schools in 2019/20 was affected by the social incidents in 2019 and the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. Audit analysed the timing of submission of school plans and school reports in 2018/19 by all kindergartens receiving NCS Grant

(i.e. 152 kindergartens), and the 266 primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million. Audit noted that some schools did not submit their school plans and/or school reports in a timely manner (see Tables 4 and 5):

- (a) ***Kindergartens.*** Of the 152 kindergartens:
 - (i) 60 (39%) kindergartens submitted their school plans late. Of the 60 kindergartens, 18 (30%) submitted their school plans more than one month late; and
 - (ii) 73 (48%) kindergartens submitted their school reports late. Of the 73 kindergartens, 18 (25%) submitted their school reports more than one month late; and

- (b) ***Primary, secondary and special schools.*** Of the 266 primary, secondary and special schools:
 - (i) 168 (63%) schools submitted their school plans late. Of the 168 schools, 26 (15%) submitted their school plans more than one month late; and
 - (ii) 176 (66%) schools submitted their school reports late. Of the 176 schools, 40 (23%) submitted their school reports more than one month late.

Table 4

Ageing analysis of delays in submission of school plans and school reports by kindergartens receiving NCS Grant (2018/19)

Delay (Month)	No. of kindergartens	
	School plan	School report
> 0 – 1	42 (70%)	55 (75%)
> 1 – 2	18	15
> 2 – 3	–	1
> 3 – 4 (Note)	– (30%)	2 (25%)
Total	60 (100%)	73 (100%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: The longest delay was 3.4 months.

Table 5

Ageing analysis of delays in submission of school plans and school reports by primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million (2018/19)

Delay (Month)	No. of schools	
	School plan	School report
> 0 – 1	142 (85%)	136 (77%)
> 1 – 2	26	29
> 2 – 3	–	8
> 3 – 4 (Note)	– (15%)	3 (23%)
Total	168 (100%)	176 (100%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: The longest delay was 3.9 months.

2.9 With a view to enabling EDB to review schools' planned and actual uses of NCS Grant and provide professional advice and support to schools on their planning and implementation of support measures for NCS students in a timely manner, Audit considers that although EDB has reminded schools to submit school plans and school reports before the deadlines, it needs to take further measures to improve the timeliness of the submission.

Need to encourage schools to make good use of NCS Grant

2.10 According to EDB's guidelines:

- (a) schools should optimise the use of NCS Grant disbursed each school year in a timely and prudent manner, and strategically deploy and pool together other school resources to tie in with school-based circumstances so as to provide support for NCS students in the school year;
- (b) as schools may need to gain experience of supporting NCS students and adjust the support strategies and modes to meet the needs of various NCS students, schools may retain part of NCS Grant up to an accumulated level not exceeding the total provision of the Grant for the school year; and
- (c) EDB will claw back surplus in excess based on schools' audited annual accounts.

In 2018/19, a total amount of \$327.8 million of NCS Grant was provided to 650 schools. Of this amount, \$298.8 million (91%) was utilised by the schools. In the same school year, EDB clawed back from 45 schools \$2.44 million of unutilised NCS Grant exceeding the ceiling.

2.11 NCS Grant was first provided by EDB to primary, secondary and special schools in 2014/15 and to kindergartens in 2017/18. Audit examined the utilisation of NCS Grant provided to schools in the period from the introduction of the Grant (i.e. 2014/15 and 2017/18 respectively) to 2018/19 and noted that many schools had not fully utilised the Grant in the school years:

Funding support to schools

- (a) **Kindergartens.** In the two school years 2017/18 and 2018/19:
- (i) in each school year, there were kindergartens that utilised less than half of NCS Grant provided, accounting for 10% (15 of 149 kindergartens) in 2017/18 and 3% (5 of 152 kindergartens) in 2018/19 (see Table 6); and
 - (ii) of the 137 kindergartens that were provided with NCS Grant in both years, 20 (15%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the two-year period, including 2 (1%) that utilised less than half of the total amount;

Table 6

**Utilisation of NCS Grant by kindergartens
(2017/18 and 2018/19)**

Percentage of NCS Grant utilised (%)	No. of kindergartens	
	2017/18	2018/19
0 – <25	5	3
25 – <50	10	2
50 – <75	28 (19%)	17 (11%)
75 – <90	36 (24%)	29 (19%)
90 – 100	70 (47%)	101 (67%)
Total	149 (100%)	152 (100%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

- (b) **Primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant of \$50,000.**
In the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19:

Funding support to schools

- (i) in each school year, there were schools that utilised less than half of NCS Grant provided, ranging from 24% (21 of 88 schools) in 2015/16 to 36% (69 of 193 schools) in 2016/17 (see Table 7); and
- (ii) of the 41 schools that were provided with NCS Grant in all the years over the five-year period, 7 (17%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the whole period, including 3 (7%) that utilised less than half of the total amount; and

Table 7

**Utilisation of NCS Grant by primary, secondary and special schools
receiving NCS Grant of \$50,000
(2014/15 to 2018/19)**

Percentage of NCS Grant utilised (%)	No. of schools				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
0 – <25	12	12	51	43	34
25 – <50	7 } 19 (29%)	9 } 21 (24%)	18 } 69 (36%)	22 } 65 (28%)	23 } 57 (25%)
50 – <75	13 (20%)	9 (10%)	27 (14%)	32 (14%)	29 (12%)
75 – <90	2 (3%)	5 (6%)	17 (9%)	22 (10%)	19 (8%)
90 – 100	32 (48%)	53 (60%)	80 (41%)	110 (48%)	127 (55%)
Total	66 (100%)	88 (100%)	193 (100%)	229 (100%)	232 (100%)

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

- (c) ***Primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million.*** In the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19:
 - (i) in each school year, there were schools that utilised less than half of NCS Grant provided, improving from 13% (26 of 196 schools) in 2014/15 to 4% (10 of 266 schools) in 2018/19 (see Table 8); and

Funding support to schools

- (ii) of the 184 schools that were provided with NCS Grant in all the years over the five-year period, 2 (1%) utilised less than 70% of the total amount of the Grant provided during the whole period.

Table 8

Utilisation of NCS Grant by primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million (2014/15 to 2018/19)

Percentage of NCS Grant utilised (%)	No. of schools				
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
0 – <25	9	3	4	5	–
25 – <50	17 } 26 (13%)	14 } 17 (8%)	5 } 9 (4%)	8 } 13 (5%)	10 } 10 (4%)
50 – <75	48 (25%)	32 (14%)	28 (12%)	33 (13%)	18 (7%)
75 – <90	42 (21%)	45 (20%)	49 (20%)	52 (21%)	44 (16%)
90 – 100	80 (41%)	128 (58%)	154 (64%)	155 (61%)	194 (73%)
Total	196 (100%)	222 (100%)	240 (100%)	253 (100%)	266 (100%)

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that as schools may need to gain experience of supporting NCS students, especially during their first year of receiving NCS Grant and when they have a marginal NCS student intake that they might have an operational need to retain part of the Grant to sustain the support measures in following years, schools are allowed to retain part of the Grant (see para. 2.10(b)). While noting that NCS Grant was first provided to kindergartens in 2017/18 and they may need to gain experience of supporting NCS students, Audit considers that EDB needs to step up monitoring of the utilisation of NCS Grant by schools and encourage schools with unjustified underspending to make good use of the Grant to support NCS students as far as possible.

Audit recommendations

- 2.12 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**
- (a) **take further measures to ensure that schools submit their school plans and school reports on the deployment of NCS Grant and the support measures in a more timely manner; and**
 - (b) **step up monitoring of the utilisation of NCS Grant by schools and encourage schools with unjustified underspending to make good use of the Grant to support NCS students as far as possible.**

Response from the Government

- 2.13 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations.

Supervisory visits to schools

Need to improve timeliness of supervisory visits to schools

- 2.14 EDB conducts supervisory visits to schools to monitor the schools' use of NCS Grant. The objectives of supervisory visits include:
- (a) to explain the policy intent and related support measures;
 - (b) to render support for schools on the use of NCS Grant;
 - (c) to provide supplementary information on the support measures for NCS students; and
 - (d) to identify good practices which can be shared with other schools.

Funding support to schools

2.15 According to EDB:

- (a) ***Primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant of \$50,000.***
For schools receiving NCS Grant of \$50,000 (i.e. the minimum grant amount), EDB monitored schools' use of NCS Grant mainly through examining school plans and school reports submitted by schools and routine telephone and/or email contacts with them. Supervisory visits were conducted only if necessary to provide schools with advice to facilitate their planning and implementation of support measures for NCS students (Note 11); and
- (b) ***All kindergartens receiving NCS Grant, and primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million.*** EDB would accord higher priority to pay supervisory visits to:
 - (i) schools newly provided with NCS Grant normally at the beginning of the school year they started to receive the Grant;
 - (ii) schools that required additional support; and
 - (iii) schools with good practices for sharing with other schools.

2.16 Audit examined the supervisory visits conducted by EDB for all kindergartens receiving NCS Grant in 2017/18 and/or 2018/19, and primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million in any school year in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 (Note 12). Audit noted that some schools were not visited in a timely manner:

- (a) ***Kindergartens.*** Of the 164 kindergartens that first received NCS Grant in 2017/18 or 2018/19, 144 (88%) were first visited by EDB in the school

Note 11: *According to EDB, such arrangement has been devised having balanced the schools' situations of optimal use of NCS Grant against the sector's general concern about the administrative workload of teachers.*

Note 12: *According to EDB, the supervisory visits in 2019/20 were affected by the social incidents in 2019 and the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020.*

year they first received the Grant, and 19 (12%) were visited in the following school year. The remaining kindergarten was not visited as it became ineligible for NCS Grant in 2018/19 and 2019/20; and

- (b) ***Primary, secondary and special schools.*** Of the 283 primary, secondary and special schools that first received NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million in any school year in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 (see Table 9):
- (i) 143 (51%) were first visited in the school year they first received the Grant;
 - (ii) 51 (18%) were first visited in the school year following the school year they first received the Grant;
 - (iii) 45 (16%) were first visited in the second school year following the school year they first received the Grant; and
 - (iv) 44 (15%) were neither visited by EDB in the school year they first received the Grant nor visited in the following two school years, including 6 (2%) schools no longer eligible for the Grant. By the end of 2019/20, 26 (9%) schools, which were special schools, had not yet been visited by EDB.

Funding support to schools

Table 9

Ageing analysis of timing of EDB's first visit to primary, secondary and special schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.65 million to \$1.5 million (as at end of 2019/20)

Timing of first visit (school year)	No. of schools that first received NCS Grant					Total
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	
In year of first receiving the Grant	64	26	24	14	15	143 (51%)
In 1st following year	49	–	–	1	1	51 (18%)
In 2nd following year	45	–	–	–	N/A	45 (16%)
In 3rd following year	4	–	–	N/A	N/A	4
In 4th following year	8	–	N/A	N/A	N/A	8
Not visited	26	3	–	2	1	32
Total	196	29	24	17	17	283 (100%)

Legend: N/A – Not applicable

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

2.17 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in January and March 2021 that:

- (a) balancing the need to visit schools in a timely manner and the constraint of manpower capacity, EDB planned to visit all the ordinary schools receiving NCS Grant once in the first three years upon the launch of the Grant and relevant support measures in 2014/15; and
- (b) such goal was achieved in 2016/17 for most of the schools. As indicated in paragraph 2.16(b)(iv), six schools were no longer eligible for NCS Grant, and thus visits were no longer necessary, leaving behind 12 schools

visited in 2017/18 or 2018/19. The remaining 26 schools not visited were special schools.

2.18 One of the objectives of EDB's supervisory visits is to provide schools with professional advice and support. In Audit's view, such visits would be more effective when conducted in the school year the schools started to receive NCS Grant as far as practicable. Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to arrange supervisory visits to schools in a more timely manner taking into account the operational and development needs of individual schools.

Audit recommendation

2.19 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should take measures to arrange supervisory visits to schools receiving NCS Grant in a more timely manner taking into account the operational and development needs of individual schools.**

Response from the Government

2.20 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation.

Feedback from stakeholders

Need to improve coverage of feedback collected

2.21 To review the implementation of support measures for NCS students by schools, EDB collected on a yearly basis, through questionnaires, feedback from major stakeholders of the primary and secondary schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million. The major stakeholders included:

- (a) principals of the schools;
- (b) coordinators of education support measures for NCS students;

Funding support to schools

- (c) Chinese Language teachers teaching NCS students;
- (d) NCS students and their parents; and
- (e) NGOs that were commissioned by schools to provide support to NCS students.

In 2019/20, 252 primary and secondary schools receiving NCS Grant ranging from \$0.8 million to \$1.5 million were covered by EDB's questionnaire survey.

2.22 According to EDB:

- (a) it collected feedback from kindergartens' personnel (including the principals, teacher coordinators or teachers concerned) through interviews with them during school visits. Given the tender age of the kindergarten students and the fact that it is not common to have heavy engagement with NGOs in kindergartens, EDB considered it not appropriate to collect views from kindergarten students and NGOs; and
- (b) taking into account the special needs of students in special schools, EDB considered it not appropriate to collect views from students in special schools.

2.23 In 2019/20, there were 433 kindergartens and 52 special schools admitting NCS students. While noting EDB's explanations in paragraph 2.22, Audit is concerned that no feedback is collected from major stakeholders of kindergartens and special schools through questionnaire survey. Audit considers that EDB needs to strengthen measures to ensure that feedback from major stakeholders of kindergartens and special schools (e.g. principals and parents) is also collected and taken into consideration in formulating support measures for NCS students in such schools.

Audit recommendation

2.24 Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should strengthen measures to ensure that feedback from major stakeholders of kindergartens and special schools is collected and taken into consideration in formulating support measures for NCS students in such schools.

Response from the Government

2.25 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation.

PART 3: CAPACITY BUILDING FOR TEACHERS

3.1 This PART examines EDB's work on building teachers' professional capacity for supporting NCS students in learning Chinese through professional development for teachers and SBSS, focusing on the following areas:

- (a) professional development requirements (paras. 3.2 to 3.8);
- (b) PEG Scheme (paras. 3.9 to 3.14); and
- (c) SBSS (paras. 3.15 to 3.24).

Professional development requirements

3.2 EDB organises professional development programmes on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language (for teachers of primary, secondary and special schools) and on supporting the learning and teaching of NCS students (for teachers in kindergartens joining KG Scheme). Examples of such programmes include seminars, workshops and e-learning classes, etc. In June 2018, EDB set a requirement for kindergartens joining KG Scheme that at least one teacher in each kindergarten should complete the Basic Course recognised by EDB. The requirement was implemented in 2 phases:

- (a) **Phase 1.** By 2018/19, kindergartens admitting 8 or more NCS students should meet the requirement; and
- (b) **Phase 2.** By 2020/21, all kindergartens admitting NCS students, regardless of the number of NCS students, should meet the requirement.

In 2018/19, of the 753 kindergartens joining KG Scheme, 152 admitted 8 or more NCS students. All the 152 kindergartens met the training requirement.

Need to consider setting professional development requirements

3.3 Audit noted that EDB had not set training requirements for primary, secondary and special schools on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language. In 2019/20, there were 988 primary, secondary and special schools (with or without NCS students), and 13,794 teachers teaching Chinese Language at these schools. Audit analysed the hours of training provided by EDB to these teachers in the period from 2014/15 to 2019/20 on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language and found the following issues:

- (a) ***Some schools did not have teachers who had attended EDB's training.*** Of the 988 schools, 252 (26%) did not have teachers who had attended EDB's training on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language during the period. Of the 252 schools, 157 (62%) had NCS students. Of the 157 schools, 4 (3%) had 10 or more NCS students. The total number of NCS students in the 157 schools each year during the period ranged from 231 to 277, accounting for 1.2% to 1.4% of the total number of NCS students studying in public sector and DSS schools; and

- (b) ***Many teachers did not attend EDB's training.*** There was no requirement for teachers to attend EDB's training on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language. Of the 13,794 teachers teaching Chinese Language in the 988 schools (including those not teaching NCS students), 9,986 (72%) did not attend EDB's training during the period. Among the remaining 3,808 teachers who attended the training, the number of training hours attended by many of them was on the low side. For instance, 1,744 (46%) of the 3,808 teachers attended training for 5 hours or less (see Table 10).

Table 10

**Number of hours of EDB's training on teaching NCS students
Chinese as a second language attended by teachers
(2014/15 to 2019/20)**

Training hours	No. of teachers
≤5	1,744 (46%)
>5 – 15	1,634 (43%)
>15 – 30	336 (8%)
>30 – 50	77 (2%)
>50 – 95	17 (1%)
Total	3,808 (100%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

3.4 Other than the training provided by EDB, teachers have other means of enhancing their professional capacity of teaching NCS students. According to EDB:

- (a) teachers are equipped with professional knowledge, pedagogy and attributes in teaching students of different backgrounds and needs through pre-service teacher education programmes. Professional development for teachers is about providing diversified opportunities and different modes of training for teachers teaching NCS students learning Chinese Language. Other than the structured professional development programmes of different themes offered by EDB, teachers can enrol in programmes/seminars of different duration offered by tertiary institutions. Teachers can also engage in modes other than structured training, such as self-learning through reading or online courses, peer learning and mentorship which usually include collaborative lesson planning and peer lesson observation in their own schools. Their professional capacity can also be enhanced via participation in professional learning communities organised by EDB or network schools of the same districts or the same school sponsoring bodies. Schools may make use of the annual staff development days to invite guest speakers to conduct thematic seminars/workshops for teachers, or apply for the relevant

SBSS according to the professional development needs of their teachers and school contexts;

- (b) teachers have to attend training to fulfil different policy requirements or set their own professional development priorities in consultation with the school management; and
- (c) since the number of NCS students admitted to different schools and their Chinese proficiency vary substantially, training needs differ among schools and teachers. Apart from encouraging teachers to participate in various external training courses and activities organised for teachers, schools also provide opportunities for internal exchange and experience sharing among their teachers.

3.5 Every year, EDB conducts a stakeholder survey targeting major stakeholders such as school principals and school coordinators (see para. 2.21) to collect their views on the education support measures for NCS students. In the stakeholder survey for 2019/20, 504 school principals and school coordinators from 252 primary and secondary schools admitting 10 or more NCS students participated. According to the findings of the survey, the majority of school principals and school coordinators (70% to 94%) supported the setting of training requirements for teachers teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language (see Table 11).

Table 11

Number of school principals and coordinators for schools admitting 10 or more NCS students supporting the setting of training requirements for Chinese Language teachers on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language (2019/20)

Training requirements	No. of principals	No. of coordinators	Overall
In-service training requirements	237 (94%)	238 (94%)	475 (94%)
Pre-service training requirements	217 (86%)	204 (81%)	421 (84%)
Training hour requirements	183 (73%)	171 (68%)	354 (70%)
Total number of respondents	252 (100%)	252 (100%)	504 (100%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

3.6 In Audit's view, setting training requirements can facilitate EDB in ensuring that teachers continue to develop their professional capacity in teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language.

Audit recommendation

3.7 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education should consider the need to set appropriate training requirements for primary, secondary and special school Chinese Language teachers on teaching NCS students Chinese as a second language, taking into account the growing number of Chinese Language teachers teaching NCS students and the diversified backgrounds and training needs of teachers and varied school contexts.**

Response from the Government

3.8 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation.

Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language)

3.9 In 2014/15, PEG Scheme was launched under the Language Fund on a pilot basis for 3 years from 2014/15 to 2016/17. The objective of PEG Scheme is to provide funding support to help Chinese Language teachers at primary, secondary and special schools acquire relevant qualifications and structured training about the teaching of Chinese to NCS students on a voluntary basis. Under the Scheme, a subsidy is granted to a teacher upon successful completion of a recognised programme of study. Recognised programmes are some designated postgraduate diploma or master's degree programmes offered by local universities. The amount of subsidy is a fixed percentage of the tuition fee, subject to a maximum amount. In 2014, an allocation of \$29 million was earmarked for the Scheme, with a view to supporting a maximum of 450 Chinese Language teachers. In 2016 and 2018, reviews were conducted on the Scheme. After the reviews, the pilot run of the Scheme were extended twice in 2016 and 2018 until the end of 2021/22 with the following enhanced incentives to encourage teachers' participation endorsed by SCOLAR (see para. 1.5(b)(i)):

- (a) in December 2016, the amount of maximum subsidy was adjusted upward from \$30,000 to \$34,000; and
- (b) in December 2018, the subsidy rate was adjusted upward from 30% to 50% of the tuition fee and the amount of maximum subsidy was further adjusted upward from \$34,000 to \$64,000.

Need to review the way forward for PEG Scheme

3.10 Audit noted that only 99 applications had been received for PEG Scheme since its launch in 2014/15. As at end of October 2020, 89 of the 99 teachers concerned had been approved under the Scheme (Note 13) to undertake structured part-time training programmes, representing only 20% of the maximum number of 450 teachers that the Scheme aimed to support (see Table 12). The total amount of subsidy provided under the Scheme was \$2.77 million as at December 2020.

Note 13: *Of the remaining 10 applications, 2 were not successful because they failed to meet the stipulated requirements, 3 had been withdrawn and 5 were being processed.*

Table 12

Number of teachers approved under PEG Scheme to undertake training programmes (2014/15 to 2020/21)

School year	No. of teachers approved
2014/15	32
2015/16	25
2016/17	11
2017/18	0
2018/19	8
2019/20	10
2020/21	3
Total	89

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

3.11 Upon enquiry about the lukewarm response to the Scheme, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that:

- (a) in preparing for the review on the Scheme in 2016, a survey was conducted, which revealed that around 30% of the school heads responding to the survey did not encourage their teachers to apply for the grant because of various reasons, for example, the NCS student intake in their schools was low and their teachers had already participated in other professional development activities. The results of the survey were reported to SCOLAR;
- (b) given that the commitment in terms of the time required to complete the study programmes (two to three years) as well as the tuition fee was heavy, it was inevitable that teachers might be hesitant in joining the Scheme; and

- (c) as a result, despite the implementation of some enhancement measures, the response to the Scheme was not encouraging.

3.12 The pilot run of PEG Scheme will end soon in 2021/22. Audit considers that EDB needs to review the way forward for PEG Scheme taking into account the lukewarm response from teachers to the Scheme.

Audit recommendation

3.13 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education should review the way forward for PEG Scheme taking into account the lukewarm response from teachers to the Scheme.**

Response from the Government

3.14 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation.

School-based support services

3.15 EDB provides SBSS to help teachers cater for the needs of NCS students in learning Chinese. The duration of support services is normally one year. Every year, schools can apply for the relevant SBSS according to development needs of their teachers. Schools that have not been allocated SBSS previously are given a higher priority. The support services under SBSS are:

- (a) ***On-site professional support services.*** EDB provides on-site professional support services to teachers to meet their specific needs, such as reviewing and developing school-based curricula, collaborative lesson planning and formulating development plans and professional development programmes;
- (b) ***University-School Support Programme (USP).*** Under USP, EDB commissions tertiary institutions for providing professional support services to schools under various projects. The projects draw on professional knowledge from the tertiary institutions, connect pedagogical theory and classroom practice, and provide a diversified mode of support services to

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teachers. Each project has a specific theme. Examples of the themes are “Effective Student Transition: Facilitating the Learning of the Chinese Language of NCS Kindergarten Students in the Transition to Primary School” and “Supporting the Learning and Teaching of Chinese Language for NCS Students in Secondary Schools”;

- (c) ***Professional Development Schools Scheme.*** Under the Professional Development Schools Scheme, schools with exemplary practices in learning and teaching and a good sharing culture form a network to promote inter-school collaboration and professional exchange through various exchange activities, such as collaborative lesson planning and experience sharing sessions;
- (d) ***School Support Partners (Seconded Teacher) Scheme.*** Under the School Support Partners (Seconded Teacher) Scheme, experienced teachers are seconded to EDB to provide support services to other teachers and to establish professional sharing platforms for enhancing teachers’ professional capacity; and
- (e) ***Professional Learning Communities.*** EDB establishes Professional Learning Communities for teachers with common concerns and interests regarding the learning and teaching of Chinese for NCS students to promote cross-school collaboration and to share experiences and resources.

3.16 For the period from 2014/15 to 2019/20, 352 schools (comprising 159 kindergartens, 98 primary schools, 80 secondary schools and 15 special schools) received SBSS. According to EDB:

- (a) during the period, on average, 132 school applications (comprising an average of 47 kindergartens, 47 primary schools, 34 secondary schools and 4 special schools) were received each year and 126 schools (ranging from 106 to 142, comprising an average of 46 kindergartens, 46 primary schools, 30 secondary schools and 4 special schools) were allocated SBSS;
- (b) the average percentage of schools that applied for and were allocated SBSS was above 95%. This reflected that SBSS had been provided to the vast majority of schools in need;

- (c) EDB often reviews schools' needs for SBSS in enhancing their teachers' professional capacity for supporting NCS students in learning Chinese and promotes SBSS through different measures;
- (d) different Divisions within EDB hold liaison meetings and contact regularly to identify schools in need. The schools identified are encouraged to apply for SBSS and their applications are accorded priority; and
- (e) territory-wide dissemination sessions are conducted by EDB and service providers for sharing of good practices and experience gained under SBSS with a view to enhancing the professional knowledge and skills of teachers concerned as well as promoting SBSS to a wider spectrum of schools with diverse needs.

Need to encourage schools to critically review their development needs and make good use of SBSS

3.17 Audit analysed the number of schools receiving SBSS in the period from 2014/15 to 2019/20 and noted room for encouraging schools with NCS students to critically review whether they should make good use of SBSS to suit their development needs:

- (a) each school year, there were 106 to 142 schools that received SBSS, representing only 10% to 14% of the total number of schools with NCS students (see Table 13);
- (b) of the 723 schools with NCS students every year throughout the period, 438 (61%) did not receive any SBSS; and
- (c) among the 438 schools, many had NCS students accounting for more than 10% of the total number of students in the schools. For example, in 2019/20, in 52 (12%) of the 438 schools, more than 10% of their students were NCS students.

The situation might reflect that whilst the demand for SBSS has stabilised, the schools with NCS students were not very keen to apply for SBSS.

Table 13

Percentage of schools with NCS students that received SBSS
(2014/15 to 2019/20)

School year	No. of schools receiving SBSS (a)	No. of schools with NCS students (b)	Percentage of schools receiving SBSS (c) = (a) ÷ (b) × 100%
2014/15	142	1,017	14%
2015/16	131	1,033	13%
2016/17	112	1,042	11%
2017/18	106	1,056	10%
2018/19	121	1,088	11%
2019/20	141	1,108	13%

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Remarks: In the period from 2014/15 to 2015/16, all applications for SBSS were successful and were provided with the services. In the period from 2016/17 to 2019/20, 4 to 14 applications each year were not successful for reasons including: (a) having received SBSS for NCS students for one year or more in the past (i.e. one to five years); (b) being allocated with Chinese-related support services covering NCS students in the year; and (c) not admitting any NCS students in the year.

3.18 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that the following could be the reasons why the schools with NCS students were not very keen to apply for SBSS:

- (a) EDB provides multifarious types of support to schools with intake of NCS students (including funding, teacher training and student support) and SBSS is just one of them. It is a very intensive type of professional development that asks for a year-long commitment of schools and a critical mass of their teachers, which might not suit the needs and contexts of individual schools;

- (b) the NCS student concentration varies a lot across schools, and schools of different concentrations of NCS students have different support needs;
- (c) the background of NCS students varies greatly and so do their support needs; and
- (d) the professional capacity of teachers varies among different schools and the schools may not find SBSS best suit their teachers' professional development needs.

3.19 Audit considers that EDB needs to:

- (a) assist schools in their review on the needs for capacity building for their teachers and exploration on the appropriate means of SBSS with a view to maximising the effectiveness of learning and teaching of NCS students; and
- (b) step up efforts in encouraging schools to critically review their development needs and make good use of SBSS where necessary. For instance, EDB may step up efforts in reaching out to schools with support needs but not submitting applications through more promotional work such as inviting them to attend EDB's dissemination activities.

Need to devise clear guidelines on school visits

3.20 Under EDB monitoring mechanism on USP projects, school visits were conducted to carry out on-site evaluation. Audit analysed the school visits conducted by EDB on the six USP projects completed in the period from 2014/15 to 2018/19 and noted that:

- (a) the percentage of schools visited by EDB in the six projects varied significantly, ranging from 20% to 77% of the participating schools, averaging 33% (see Table 14); and
- (b) the frequency of visits per school varied significantly. While 142 (67%) of the 212 participating schools in the six projects were not visited by EDB,

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28 (13%) schools were visited more than once (Note 14). In particular, one school was visited five times by EDB (including one follow-up visit — see Table 15).

There was no documentary evidence showing the justifications for the differences in the frequency of visits to individual schools and in the coverage of schools. EDB had not issued clear guidelines on the criteria of selecting schools for visit.

Table 14

**Number and percentage of participating schools visited by EDB under USP
(2014/15 to 2018/19)**

Project	No. of participating schools (a)	No. of schools visited (b)	Percentage of schools visited (c) = (b) ÷ (a) × 100%
A	80	16	20%
B	13	10	77%
C	28	11	39%
D	25	9	36%
E	26	11	42%
F	40	13	33%
Overall	212	70	33%

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Remarks: A school which had participated in more than one project was correspondingly counted more than once in the overall number.

Note 14: *Of the 212 schools, 34 were visited more than once. However, ten visits to the 34 schools were follow-up visits. If follow-up visits were excluded, 28 schools were visited more than once.*

Table 15

**Analysis of frequency of EDB's visits to schools
(2014/15 to 2018/19)**

No. of visits conducted by EDB	No. of participating schools						
	Project A	Project B	Project C	Project D	Project E	Project F	Total
0	64 (80%)	3 (23%)	17 (61%)	16 (64%)	15 (58%)	27 (68%)	142 (67%)
1	8 (10%)	2 (15%)	6 (21%)	5 (20%)	4 (15%)	11 (28%)	36 (17%)
2	8 (10%)	6 (46%)	5 (18%)	2 (8%)	7 (27%)	1 (2%)	29 (13%)
3	—	1 (8%)	—	2 (8%)	—	1 (2%)	4 (2%)
4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	—	1 (8%)	—	—	—	—	1 (1%)
Overall	80(100%)	13(100%)	28(100%)	25(100%)	26(100%)	40(100%)	212(100%)

} 34
(16%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Remarks:

- (a) *A school which had participated in more than one project was correspondingly counted more than once in the overall number.*
- (b) *If follow-up visits were excluded, 28 of the 34 schools were visited more than once.*

3.21 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that:

- (a) EDB had long been monitoring the quality of SBSS provided by service providers through various means, taking into consideration the manpower strengths, the support focuses of the projects and the needs of individual schools. On-site monitoring was only one of them;
- (b) apart from on-site monitoring of USP projects, EDB also conducted annual surveys and focus group interviews with the participating schools;

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- (c) throughout the year, EDB maintained close communication with the service providers through formal and informal meetings such as phone calls and emails. Service providers were also required to submit interim reports and annual reports to detail their support progress and effectiveness;
- (d) feedback was collected from the participating schools to make sure that the support services had well catered for their professional development needs; and
- (e) in case of schools with specific concerns (e.g. schools with teachers who were reluctant to change, schools that were difficult to reach), EDB exercised professional judgement and paid more visits to them with the service providers to better address individual needs.

3.22 After the completion of the six projects in 2018/19, EDB commissioned four projects to tertiary institutions in 2019/20 and 2020/21 to continue the provision of professional support services. For these four projects, EDB also conducted school visits to carry out on-site evaluations as part of its monitoring mechanism. To ensure that school visits are conducted cost-effectively in achieving the intended objectives, Audit considers that EDB needs to issue clear guidelines specifying the coverage in selecting schools to visit and the factors that should be considered in school selection.

Audit recommendations

3.23 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **step up efforts in assisting schools in their review on the needs for capacity building for their teachers and encouraging schools to make good use of SBSS where necessary with a view to maximising the effectiveness of learning and teaching of NCS students; and**
- (b) **issue clear guidelines on the on-site evaluation of projects commissioned to tertiary institutions under SBSS, specifying the coverage in selecting schools to visit and the factors that should be considered in school selection.**

Response from the Government

3.24 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations.

PART 4: OTHER SUPPORT MEASURES

4.1 This PART examines issues relating to other support measures for NCS students, focusing on the following areas:

- (a) Student Support Programme (paras. 4.2 to 4.15);
- (b) Summer Bridging Programme (paras. 4.16 to 4.24);
- (c) life planning education services (paras. 4.25 to 4.30);
- (d) information to facilitate school choices (paras. 4.31 to 4.39); and
- (e) enhancement of support measures (paras. 4.40 to 4.45).

Student Support Programme

4.2 Since 2007, EDB has commissioned a tertiary institution to run a number of learning centres to operate the Student Support Programme for NCS students. The centres support NCS students who are less proficient in Chinese by offering remedial programmes for these students after school hours or during holidays. In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, the total number of centres operated by the tertiary institution in various districts was about 20 (ranging from 19 to 22). The annual expenditure incurred for operating the centres ranged from \$2.9 million to \$4.7 million.

Decrease in the number of schools nominating NCS students and the number of NCS students nominated

4.3 The Student Support Programme offers assistance to NCS students free of charge. In August/September every year, EDB invites public sector primary and secondary schools and DSS schools (Note 15) to nominate NCS students to enrol in

Note 15: *For DSS schools, only NCS students with fee remission are eligible to enrol in the Student Support Programme.*

the Student Support Programme. Audit examined the number of students nominated by schools in the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20 and noted that:

- (a) the number of schools nominating NCS students decreased by 48 (38%) from 128 in 2015/16 to 80 in 2019/20. Of the schools admitting NCS students, the percentage of schools that nominated NCS students decreased from 21% in 2015/16 to 13% in 2019/20 (see Table 16); and

Table 16

**Number and percentage of schools with NCS students
nominating NCS students to the Student Support Programme
(2015/16 to 2019/20)**

School year	No. of schools		
	With students nominated	Without students nominated	Total
2015/16	128 (21%)	480 (79%)	608 (100%)
2016/17	143 (24%)	456 (76%)	599 (100%)
2017/18	98 (16%)	518 (84%)	616 (100%)
2018/19	82 (13%)	551 (87%)	633 (100%)
2019/20	80 (13%)	553 (87%)	633 (100%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Remarks: The number of schools includes public sector primary and secondary schools and DSS schools and does not include special schools.

- (b) the number of NCS students nominated decreased by 217 (22%) from 974 in 2015/16 to 757 in 2019/20, after reaching a peak of 1,057 students in 2016/17 (see Table 17).

Other support measures

Table 17

**Number and percentage of NCS students nominated to
the Student Support Programme
(2015/16 to 2019/20)**

School year	No. of NCS students		
	Nominated	Not nominated (Note)	Total
2015/16	974 (5%)	16,766 (95%)	17,740 (100%)
2016/17	1,057 (6%)	17,244 (94%)	18,301 (100%)
2017/18	724 (4%)	18,281 (96%)	19,005 (100%)
2018/19	811 (4%)	18,519 (96%)	19,330 (100%)
2019/20	757 (4%)	19,115 (96%)	19,872 (100%)

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

Note: *The number of NCS students studying in DSS schools without fee remission (see Note 15 to para. 4.3), if any, had not been excluded because EDB had not collected information on the number of such students.*

4.4 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that:

- (a) the decrease in the number of schools nominating NCS students to the Student Support Programme and in the number of students nominated might be attributable to the fact that starting from 2014/15, EDB had put in place a series of enhanced support measures for NCS students covering funding support, professional development for teachers, SBSS, etc. Schools admitting NCS students had been provided with more resources for developing school-based programmes to suit the learning needs of their NCS students; and
- (b) every school year, EDB sent letters to all public sector primary and secondary schools and DSS schools in August/September and conducted briefing session in September to invite schools to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Student Support Programme.

While recognising EDB’s efforts in enhancing various support measures for NCS students, Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to promote the Student Support Programme to NCS students and schools with a view to encouraging schools to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Programme.

Need to improve drop-out rate and attendance rate of students

4.5 In the period from 2016/17 to 2018/19 (Note 16), of the 2,195 NCS students enrolled in the Student Support Programme, 437 (20%) dropped out of the Programme (see Table 18).

Table 18

**Number of NCS students dropping out
of the Student Support Programme
(2016/17 to 2018/19)**

School year	No. of NCS students		Drop-out rate (c) = (b) ÷ (a) × 100%
	Enrolled (a)	Dropped out (b)	
2016/17	805	169	21 %
2017/18	686	130	19 %
2018/19	704	138	20 %
Overall	2,195	437	20 %

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

4.6 Students enrolled in the Student Support Programme are divided into about 50 study groups. The study groups are conducted after school from Monday to Friday or on Saturday mornings. Each week, there are 1 to 2 lessons of about 1 to 3 hours per lesson. Audit analysed the attendance of the students in the period from 2016/17 to 2018/19 (see Note 16 to para. 4.5) and noted that:

Note 16: *According to EDB, the Student Support Programme in 2019/20 was affected by the social incidents in 2019 and the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020.*

Other support measures

- (a) the overall average attendance rate of all the study groups was 67% in 2016/17, 64% in 2017/18 and 69% in 2018/19; and
- (b) in each school year, 15 to 21 study groups (i.e. 32% to 45% of total number of study groups) had average attendance rates at or below 60% (see Table 19).

Table 19

**Average attendance rates of study groups
under the Student Support Programme
(2016/17 to 2018/19)**

School year	No. of study groups				Total
	Average attendance rate				
	≤ 40%	> 40% to 60%	> 60% to 80%	> 80%	
2016/17	3 (6%)	13 (27%) 16 (33%)	22 (46%)	10 (21%)	48 (100%)
2017/18	2 (4%)	19 (41%) 21 (45%)	16 (35%)	9 (20%)	46 (100%)
2018/19	1 (2%)	14 (30%) 15 (32%)	16 (35%)	15 (33%)	46 (100%)

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

4.7 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that:

- (a) given the series of enhanced support measures for NCS students put in place by EDB starting from 2014/15 as mentioned in paragraph 4.4(a), schools had been providing more after-school activities and school-based support to NCS students in recent years; and
- (b) since there might be time clash with other student programmes and activities conducted after school and on Saturdays, NCS students might have difficulties in attending EDB's lessons.

Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to encourage and facilitate students to attend lessons, and improve the drop-out rate and the attendance rate of the Student Support Programme (e.g. by addressing the issue of time clash).

Need to ensure that students are arranged into study groups according to their learning needs

4.8 Although NCS students in the same school level may have different Chinese language competencies and learning needs, NCS students enrolled in the Student Support Programme are divided into study groups according to school levels. For instance, Primary 1 students are arranged into the same group while Primary 2 students are arranged into another group. Audit noted that many NCS students found that the study materials used in their study groups were not appropriate for their learning level.

4.9 Every year, NCS students are invited to give views on the Student Support Programme by completing a questionnaire. One of the questions in the questionnaire asks NCS students to rate the difficulty of the study materials used in their study groups by a five-point scale, namely “very difficult”, “quite difficult”, “just right”, “quite easy” and “too easy”. Audit examined the results of questionnaires completed by NCS students in the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20 and noted that each school year less than half of the students considered that the study materials used in the study groups were just right to their learning needs. Around 51% to 57% of the students found that the materials were not at the appropriate level of difficulty for them (i.e. either very/quite difficult or too/quite easy).

4.10 In Audit’s view, NCS students have diverse background and learning needs. For example, some NCS students were born in Hong Kong and some are new arrivals. Therefore, the Chinese language competencies and the learning needs of NCS students may be very different even though they are at the same school levels. Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to ensure that students are arranged into study groups of appropriate levels to cater for their individual learning needs instead of arranging them according to their school levels. For instance, an assessment can be made to gauge the Chinese language competencies of the students before arranging them into study groups.

Other support measures

Need to improve course instructors' performance and students' performance

4.11 EDB conducts lesson observations to monitor the Student Support Programme. During lesson observations, course instructors' performance and students' performance (Note 17) are rated by EDB staff on a scale of 1 to 4. A higher rating represents a better performance. Verbal advice is provided to the instructors of the centres after the lesson observations. Visit reports are prepared for follow-up and record purposes.

4.12 In the period from 2017/18 to 2018/19, EDB conducted lesson observations on 42 study groups. Audit examination of the visit reports revealed that, of the 42 study groups (see Table 20):

- (a) course instructors' performance was rated "1" in 2 (5%) study groups, "2" in 18 (43%) study groups, and "3" or "4" in 22 (52%) study groups; and
- (b) students' performance was rated "1" in 3 (7%) study groups, "2" in 14 (33%) study groups, and "3" or "4" in 25 (60%) study groups.

Note 17: *Course instructors' performance is assessed mainly based on the suitability of teaching materials, teaching skills, professional knowledge and experience of the instructors. Students' performance is assessed mainly based on confidence of NCS students in using Chinese and the level of adaptation to the local education curriculum of Chinese Language.*

Table 20

**Ratings in lesson observations of the study groups
of the Student Support Programme
(2017/18 to 2018/19)**

School year	No. of study groups									
	Rating on course instructors' performance					Rating on students' performance				
	Rated "1"	Rated "2"	Rated "3"	Rated "4"	Total	Rated "1"	Rated "2"	Rated "3"	Rated "4"	Total
2017/18	1	9	10	—	20	2	8	9	1	20
2018/19	1	9	11	1	22	1	6	13	2	22
Overall	2 (5%)	18 (43%)	21 (50%)	1 (2%)	42 (100%)	3 (7%)	14 (33%)	22 (53%)	3 (7%)	42 (100%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

4.13 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that the scale of 1 to 4 denoted “poor”, “satisfactory”, “good” and “excellent” performance respectively as commonly adopted. Audit noted that there was room for improvement in course instructors’ performance/students’ performance in some study groups even though they were rated “satisfactory”. For instance, in 11 of the 18 study groups in which the course instructors’ performance was rated “satisfactory”, EDB had given comments on the course instructors’ performance which indicated deficiencies in learning content, teaching materials, classroom instructions or classroom management. Audit considers that EDB needs to take measures to improve the course instructors’ performance and students’ performance to enhance the effectiveness of the Student Support Programme.

Audit recommendations

4.14 Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should take measures to:

- (a) promote the Student Support Programme to NCS students and schools with a view to encouraging schools to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Programme;

Other support measures

- (b) **encourage and facilitate students to attend lessons, and improve the drop-out rate and the attendance rate of the Student Support Programme;**
- (c) **ensure that students enrolled in the Student Support Programme are arranged into study groups of appropriate levels to cater for their individual learning needs, instead of arranging them according to their school levels; and**
- (d) **improve the course instructors' performance and students' performance to enhance the effectiveness of the Student Support Programme.**

Response from the Government

4.15 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations.

Summer Bridging Programme

4.16 Since 2004, to facilitate NCS Primary 1 entrants' adaptation to classroom setting with the use of the Chinese language, primary schools have been invited to run the Summer Bridging Programme during the summer vacation before NCS students start their Primary 1. Since 2007, to consolidate NCS students' learning of the Chinese language at different key stages, the Programme has been extended to cover NCS students progressing to Primary 2 to 4. Starting from 2013, the Programme has been enhanced to allow the parents of NCS students to accompany their children in participating in the Programme with a view to bringing about more effective learning of the Chinese language with parental support and home-school collaboration.

Need to improve participation rate

4.17 Every year, EDB issues Circular Memorandum in April/May to public sector primary schools and primary schools offering local curriculum under DSS to invite them to apply for funding to operate the Summer Bridging Programme. Subvention is disbursed to schools according to the number of classes approved by EDB, taking into account the total number of participants and groupings. The subvention in 2019 was \$23,140 per class. In 2019, EDB approved funding of

\$2 million for 29 schools to operate the Programme. The total number of classes operated was 86.

4.18 Audit examined the number of participants of the Summer Bridging Programme held in the period from 2013 to 2019 (Note 18) and noted that although the number of NCS students eligible to participate in the Programme increased by 1,226 (22%) from 5,602 in 2013 to 6,828 in 2019, the number of NCS students participating in the Programme decreased by 590 (34%) from 1,730 in 2013 to 1,140 in 2019. The participation rate (i.e. number of NCS students participating in the Programme as a percentage of the number of eligible students) was low and decreased continuously from 31% in 2013 to 17% in 2019 (see Table 21). As mentioned in paragraph 4.4(a), starting from 2014/15, EDB has put in place a series of enhanced support measures for NCS students covering funding support, professional development for teachers, SBSS, etc. Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that there were competition and time clash with other student programmes and activities conducted in the summer, hence students might have difficulties in attending the lessons. These might have accounted for the decrease in the number and percentage of NCS students participating in the Summer Bridging Programme. Moreover, EDB promoted the Programme in May and June by placing promotion leaflets in Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities of the Home Affairs Department, broadcasting radio announcements and placing advertisements in the media.

Note 18: *According to EDB, the number of participants of the Summer Bridging Programme in 2020 was affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020.*

Table 21**Number of NCS students participating in the Summer Bridging Programme
(2013 to 2019)**

Year	No. of NCS students		Participation rate (c) = (b) ÷ (a) × 100%
	Eligible to participate (a)	Participated (b)	
2013	5,602	1,730	31%
2014	5,973	1,750	29%
2015	6,227	1,650	26%
2016	6,427	1,590	25%
2017	6,609	1,390	21%
2018	6,688	1,260	19%
2019	6,828	1,140	17%

Source: *Audit analysis of EDB records*

4.19 While recognising EDB's efforts in enhancing various support measures for NCS students, Audit considers that EDB needs to step up efforts in encouraging schools to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Summer Bridging Programme.

***Some schools did not include all the required information of
Summer Bridging Programme in their school reports***

4.20 To enhance accountability and transparency, EDB requires schools to publish a school report annually for public reference on the schools' achievements and areas for improvement. EDB also requires participating schools to review the Summer Bridging Programme annually and include the following information in their school reports:

- (a) the findings of the review;
- (b) the implementation details of the Programme;

- (c) the number of participating NCS students and parents of NCS students; and
- (d) the effectiveness of the Programme in improving NCS students' learning of the Chinese language.

EDB conducts random checking and offers verbal advice to participating schools that do not have all the necessary information included in their reports for follow-up actions.

4.21 Audit examined 50 school reports of the schools participating in the Summer Bridging Programme in the period from 2017 to 2020 and noted that:

- (a) 12 (24%) school reports included all the information of the Programme as required;
- (b) 18 (36%) school reports omitted some of the required information; and
- (c) 20 (40%) school reports omitted all the required information.

4.22 Audit considers that EDB needs to step up measures to ensure that the participating schools of the Summer Bridging Programme include in their annual school reports all the required information of the Programme with a view to enhancing accountability and the transparency of the schools' operation of the Programme.

Audit recommendations

4.23 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **step up efforts in encouraging schools to nominate NCS students to enrol in the Summer Bridging Programme; and**
- (b) **step up measures to ensure that the participating schools of the Summer Bridging Programme include in their annual school reports all the required information of the Programme with a view to enhancing**

Other support measures

accountability and the transparency of the schools' operation of the Programme.

Response from the Government

4.24 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations.

Life planning education services

4.25 EDB commissioned an NGO to implement a pilot project in the period from 2015/16 to 2017/18 to provide life planning education services to NCS students with a view to preparing them for further studies and career pursuits. Starting from 2018/19, EDB has regularised the services, which comprise the following:

- (a) provision of on-site support services on life planning education to secondary schools with more intake of NCS students. On-site support services include arranging training and career exploration activities such as career visits and job shadowing for NCS students, as well as conducting training for teachers and parents of NCS students; and
- (b) organising one-off career exploration activities for NCS students in secondary schools not participating in (a), including those with less intake of NCS students.

In the period from 2015/16 to 2019/20, the amount of annual expenditure incurred on life planning education services ranged from \$0.7 million to \$2.4 million.

Need to endeavour to fulfil the needs of schools and NCS students for life planning education services

4.26 After the life planning education services were regularised in 2018/19, EDB has conducted quotation exercises annually to select the service provider. Audit examined the invitations of quotation for the period from 2018/19 to 2020/21 and noted that:

- (a) every year in the three-year period, invitations were sent to the same five service providers; and
- (b) the responses were lukewarm. 4 (80%) of the 5 service providers did not respond in 2018/19 and 2020/21 and 3 (60%) did not respond in 2019/20.

4.27 Audit noted that the demand from schools for on-site support services on life planning education was high. Many schools and NCS students did not succeed in their applications for the services due to the limited capacity of the service provider. In the period from 2018/19 to 2020/21 (see Table 22):

- (a) the numbers of schools and NCS students applying for the services increased by 19 (112%) from 17 to 36 and by 499 (157%) from 318 to 817 respectively;
- (b) the numbers of schools and NCS students with unsuccessful applications each year ranged from 7 to 20 and 121 to 497 respectively; and
- (c) the percentages of schools and NCS students with unsuccessful applications each year ranged from 30% to 56% and 35% to 61% respectively.

Table 22

Numbers of schools and NCS students provided with on-site support services on life planning education (2018/19 to 2020/21)

School year	Applications received		Unsuccessful applications		Services provided	
	No. of schools	No. of NCS students	No. of schools	No. of NCS students	No. of schools	No. of NCS students
2018/19 (Note)	17	318	9 (53%)	121 (38%)	8 (47%)	197 (62%)
2019/20	23	502	7 (30%)	174 (35%)	16 (70%)	328 (65%)
2020/21	36	817	20 (56%)	497 (61%)	16 (44%)	320 (39%)

Source: Audit analysis of EDB records

Note: The on-site support services commenced in the second term.

4.28 Audit considers that EDB needs to ascertain the reasons for the lukewarm response from the service providers for the life planning education services and explore whether there are other suitable service providers who may be interested in providing the services. EDB also needs to endeavour to increase the capacity in the provision of on-site support services on life planning education with a view to meeting the needs of schools and NCS students for the services.

Audit recommendations

4.29 **Audit has recommended that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **ascertain the reasons for the lukewarm response from the service providers for the life planning education services and explore whether there are other suitable service providers who may be interested in providing the services; and**

- (b) **endeavour to increase the capacity in the provision of on-site support services on life planning education with a view to meeting the needs of schools and NCS students for the services.**

Response from the Government

4.30 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations.

Information to facilitate school choices

4.31 All eligible children, irrespective of their races or places of birth, enjoy equal opportunities in admission to schools. To help parents of NCS students understand the local education system in Hong Kong and facilitate them in making informed school choices, EDB has taken the following measures:

- (a) translating the Parent Information Package and leaflets on kindergarten education, school places allocation systems and support for NCS students into languages of diverse races (Note 19);
- (b) organising dedicated briefing sessions on admission to kindergartens and the allocation systems of Primary One and Secondary One school places;
- (c) providing a dedicated website and a dedicated hotline for NCS students and their parents to obtain information about local schools; and
- (d) arranging interviews with individual parents for referring their non-Chinese speaking children to special schools. Information on the referral and placement mechanism for special schools is introduced in English during the interviews.

Note 19: *The languages of diverse races include Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Nepali, Punjabi (Indian), Tagalog, Thai and Urdu.*

Other support measures

Need to step up efforts to enhance transparency of kindergartens' admission arrangement

4.32 EDB has issued circulars to kindergartens joining KG Scheme, stating that their school-based admission mechanism must be fair, just and open, and in compliance with the existing anti-discrimination legislation (e.g. Race Discrimination Ordinance — Cap. 602). According to EDB's guidelines on admission arrangements:

- (a) kindergartens must provide application forms and relevant admission information (e.g. admission criteria and interview arrangements) both in Chinese and English; and
- (b) kindergartens should arrange interpretation and/or translation services for applicants where necessary, or allow non-Chinese speaking children and their parents to be accompanied by a Chinese speaking relative/friend during the interview to facilitate communication.

4.33 In December 2020, EDB provided a one-off website enhancement grant to all kindergartens joining KG Scheme for them to enhance their school websites by 31 December 2021 to provide basic school information in both Chinese and English (e.g. an introduction to the school and information on admission arrangements, and a link to the school information on EDB's webpage "Profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres").

4.34 In January 2021, Audit examined the websites of 105 kindergartens joining KG Scheme in three districts with a significant number of NCS students. They were located in Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories respectively (i.e. 12 in Wanchai, 24 in Yau Tsim Mong and 69 in Yuen Long) (Note 20). Audit found that:

Note 20: *There were a total of 109 kindergartens joining KG Scheme in the three districts. Admission information was not available on the websites of 4 kindergartens because the websites were under maintenance or the related admission information had been removed from the websites subsequent to the close of admission application.*

- (a) 2 (2%) kindergartens did not provide the admission information in English; and
- (b) 47 (45%) kindergartens did not indicate on their webpages that they would provide interpretation and/or translation services, or allow non-Chinese speaking children and their parents to be accompanied by a Chinese speaking relative/friend during the interview to facilitate communication.

4.35 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that:

- (a) EDB had followed up with the 2 kindergartens in paragraph 4.34(a) and requested them to rectify the situation; and
- (b) EDB would conduct inspection of kindergartens' websites to ensure that they are in compliance with the requirements.

Audit considers that EDB needs to closely monitor the websites of kindergartens joining KG Scheme to ensure their compliance with EDB's guidelines on admission arrangements. EDB also needs to encourage kindergartens to indicate on their webpages that interpretation and/or translation services may be arranged, and non-Chinese speaking children and their parents are allowed to be accompanied by a Chinese speaking relative/friend during the interview.

Need to improve the disclosure of admission criteria

4.36 Placement of students to Secondary One school places follows the procedures stipulated in the Secondary School Places Allocation System, regardless of whether they are NCS students or not. The Secondary School Places Allocation System has two stages. In the first stage (i.e. the Discretionary Places stage), each student may apply to not more than two secondary schools (Note 21). Schools may admit suitable students according to their educational philosophy and characteristics.

Note 21: *Students who are unsuccessful in obtaining a place under the Discretionary Places stage will be allocated to a Secondary One place under the Central Allocation stage based on the student's allocation band, parental choice of schools and the computer-generated random number.*

Other support measures

EDB requires secondary schools to make public prior to admission the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion. Audit noted that:

- (a) EDB did not require secondary schools to disclose the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion in both Chinese and English; and
- (b) of 52 secondary schools in three districts (i.e. 14 in Wanchai, 14 in Yau Tsim Mong and 24 in Yuen Long) whose websites were examined by Audit in January 2021:
 - (i) 15 (29%) schools had made public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion only in Chinese but not in English; and
 - (ii) 4 (8%) schools, while making public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion in both Chinese and English, had the icon directing to the English webpage shown in Chinese only.

4.37 Audit considers that EDB needs to improve the disclosure of the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion for the Discretionary Places stage of the Secondary School Places Allocation System, in order to help parents of NCS students understand such information to facilitate school choices.

Audit recommendations

4.38 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should:**

- (a) **closely monitor the websites of kindergartens joining KG Scheme to ensure their compliance with EDB's guidelines on admission arrangements;**
- (b) **encourage kindergartens to indicate on their webpages that interpretation and/or translation services may be arranged, and non-Chinese speaking children and their parents are allowed to be accompanied by a Chinese speaking relative/friend during the interview; and**

- (c) **encourage secondary schools to make public the admission criteria and weighting of each criterion for the Discretionary Places stage of the Secondary School Places Allocation System in both Chinese and English, in order to help parents of NCS students understand such information to facilitate school choices.**

Response from the Government

4.39 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendations.

Enhancement of support measures

4.40 Starting from 2014/15, EDB has enhanced the support measures for NCS students, including:

- (a) the implementation of Learning Framework (see Note 5 to para. 1.5(a)) in primary and secondary schools;
- (b) NCS Grant to schools for providing intensive learning of Chinese for NCS students and creating an inclusive environment in schools (see PART 2); and
- (c) in-service teachers' professional development and SBSS for supporting NCS students (see PART 3).

Need to monitor the implementation of support measures

4.41 In June and July 2017, in the papers submitted to the Panel on Education of the Legislative Council (LegCo) reporting the progress on the implementation of support measures for NCS students in learning Chinese, EDB stated that:

- (a) data had been collected and analysed since 2014/15 for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the support measures (including the Learning Framework);

Other support measures

- (b) it would evaluate the effectiveness of the support measures to ensure the quality of these measures and refine individual measures as appropriate; and
- (c) it would review the Learning Framework as appropriate at an interval of three years upon completion of each Key Stage (e.g. Primary 1 to 3).

4.42 In November 2018, EDB informed LegCo that:

- (a) the support measures needed time to take root and create a sustainable impact on NCS students. EDB would have to collect more data for in-depth analysis; and
- (b) it was collating data and information collected and would announce the findings of the review of the Learning Framework after discussing with the Curriculum Development Council (Note 22).

4.43 Upon enquiry, EDB informed Audit in March 2021 that:

- (a) it had been collecting information to monitor the implementation of the support measures and making refinements in an ongoing manner. The review of Learning Framework had been completed. In January 2019, the revised Learning Framework was uploaded to EDB's website for teachers' reference and use. In parallel, the relevant teaching resources had been updated accordingly. EDB would continue to collect information to evaluate the effectiveness of the support measures and make refinements as necessary;
- (b) all along, EDB closely monitored the implementation of the support measures for NCS students, assessed the progress, maintained communication with schools and stakeholders at hand, explored further room for continued enhancement, and informed the public of the

Note 22: *The Curriculum Development Council is a free-standing advisory body appointed by the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to give advice to the Government on matters relating to curriculum development for the local school system.*

implementation of the policies in a timely manner through multifarious means; and

- (c) EDB reported the updated development to various advisory bodies/authorities to gauge the views of the sector and share evaluation findings. In addition, EDB reported on the issue to LegCo from time to time, and briefed Members on and elucidated the policies as appropriate. EDB also responded to observations raised and followed up recommendations as and when appropriate.

Audit considers that EDB needs to take on board the observations and recommendations of this Audit Report, and continue to monitor the implementation of the support measures for NCS students and make refinements as necessary.

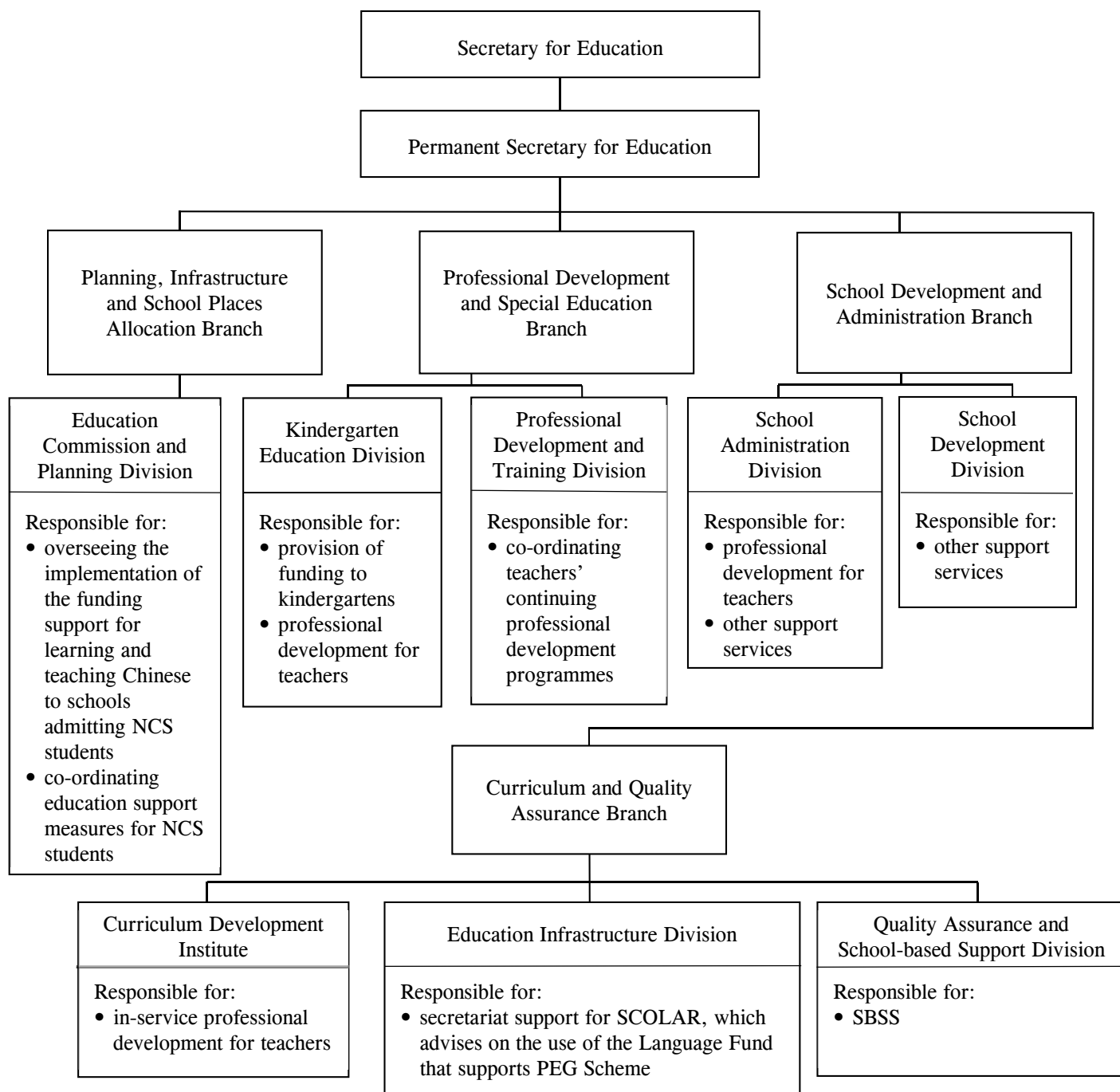
Audit recommendation

4.44 **Audit has *recommended* that the Secretary for Education should take on board the observations and recommendations of this Audit Report, and continue to monitor the implementation of the support measures for NCS students and make refinements as necessary.**

Response from the Government

4.45 The Secretary for Education agrees with the audit recommendation.

Education Bureau: Organisation chart (extract)
(31 December 2020)



Source: EDB records

Remarks: This chart shows the various teams of EDB responsible for the provision of education support measures to NCS students.

Acronyms and abbreviations

Audit	Audit Commission
DSS	Direct Subsidy Scheme
EDB	Education Bureau
KG Scheme	Kindergarten education scheme
Learning Framework	Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework
LegCo	Legislative Council
NCS Grant	Enhanced additional funding support for non-Chinese speaking students
NCS students	Non-Chinese speaking students
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
PEG Scheme	Professional Enhancement Grant Scheme for Chinese Language Teachers (Teaching Chinese as a Second Language)
SBSS	School-based support services
SCOLAR	Standing Committee on Language Education and Research
USP	University-School Support Programme