

EDUCATION SUPPORT MEASURES FOR NON-CHINESE SPEAKING STUDENTS

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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.