

Summary of Landscape Study: Primary School Education for Non-Chinese-Speaking Children With Special Education Needs in Hong Kong



Introduction

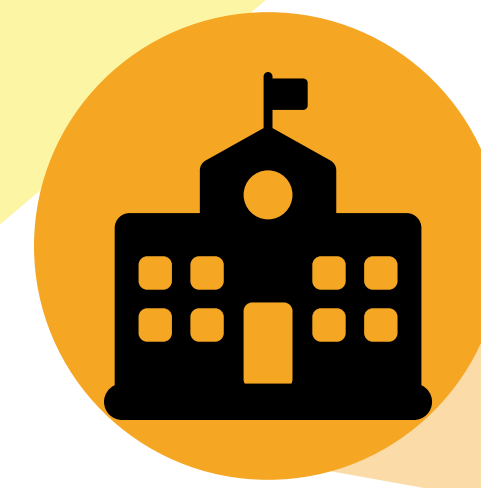
The purpose of this study is to understand the landscape of primary schools in Hong Kong and how they address the education of non-Chinese-speaking (NCS) children with special educational needs (SEN).

In order to gauge the various views of stakeholders, The Zubin Foundation engaged with school principals, families affected, NGOs and legislators.

Stakeholders



124 Children



113 Families

63 Schools



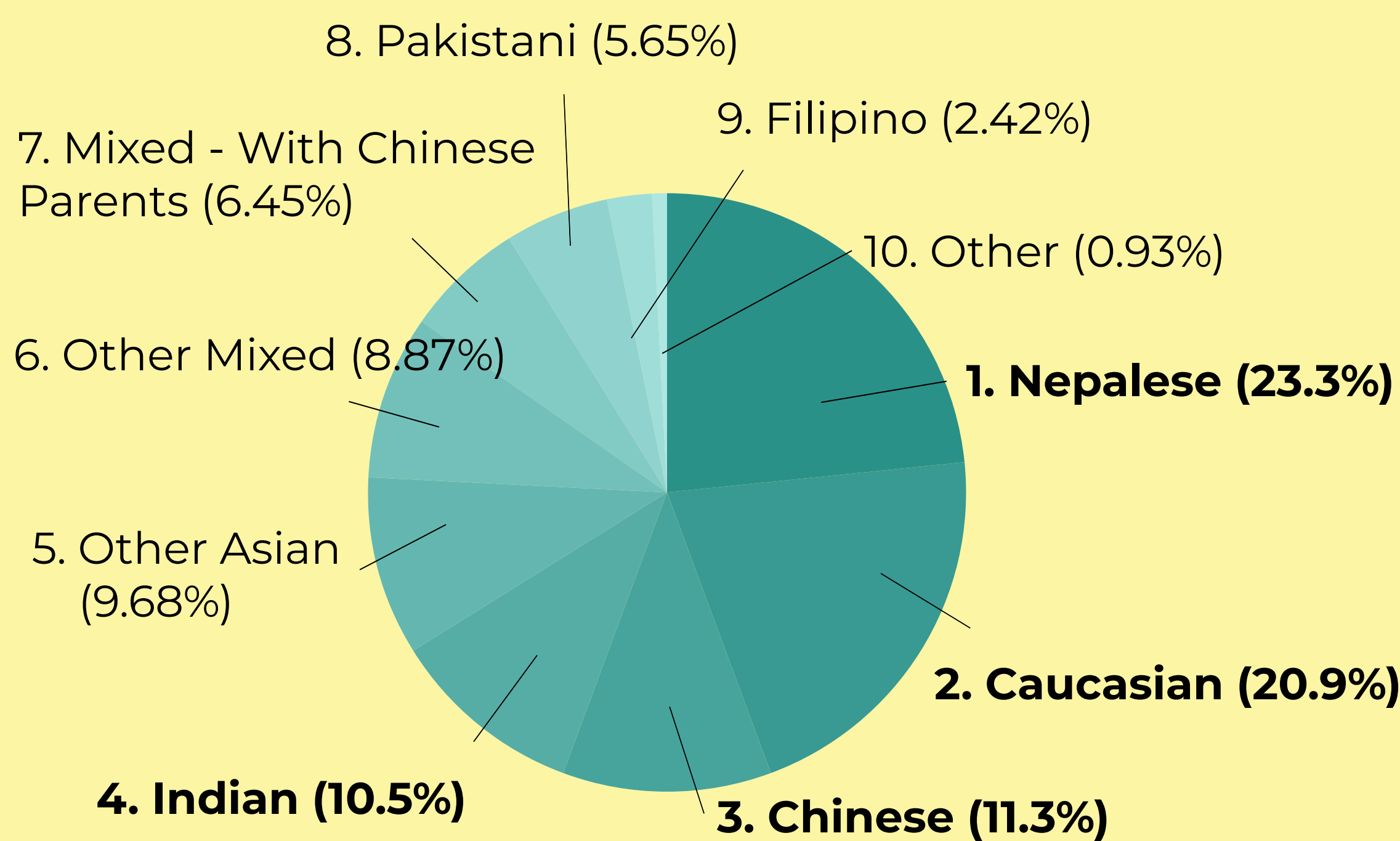
17 NGOs



3 Legislators

Children

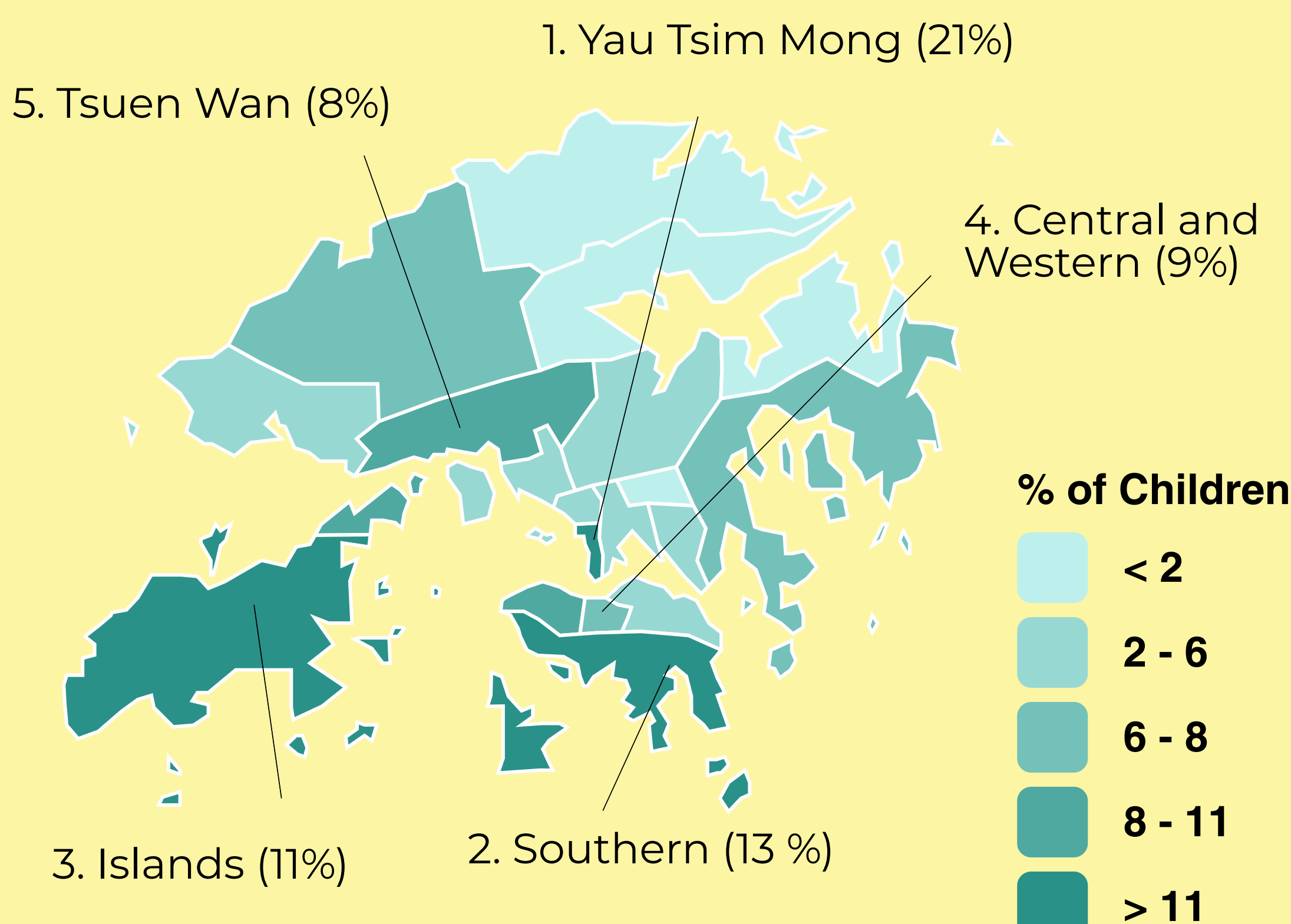
Ethnicity



Schools



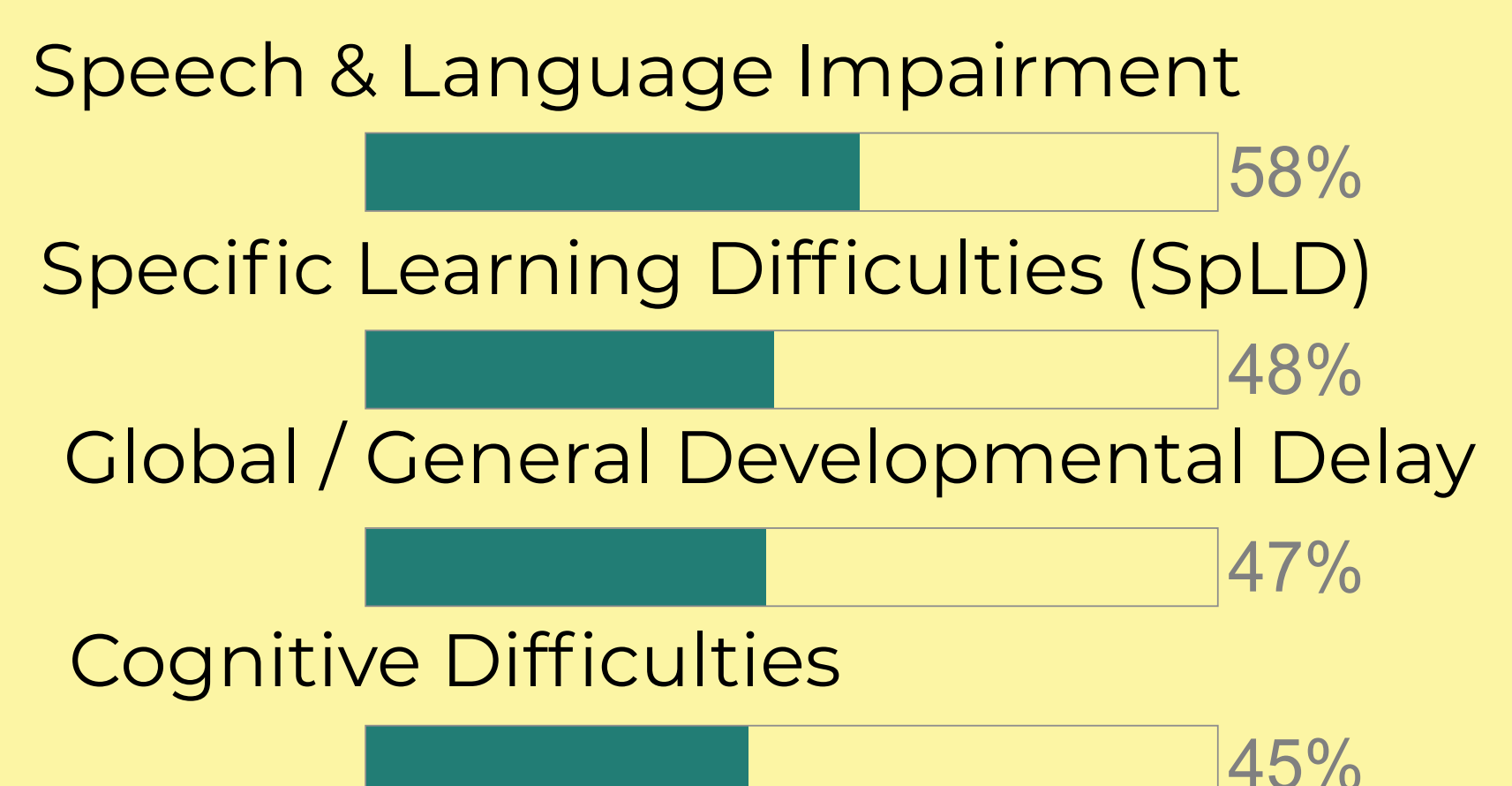
Residential Districts

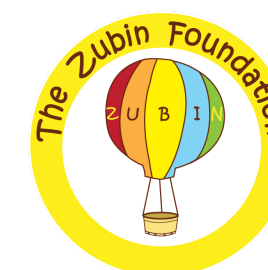


Language(s) used at home



Diagnosed learning disabilities



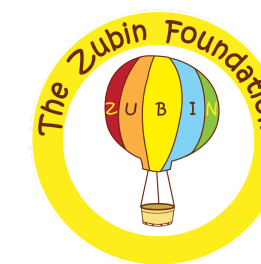


Findings

Stakeholders raised the following main issues:

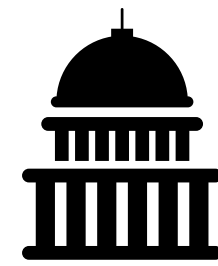


- **NCS SEN children are disadvantaged even before primary school:** Kindergarten-aged children are already at a disadvantage because there are limited places in the two government Early Education Training Centres (EETCs) (for mild and moderate needs children) and there are no English-speaking Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs) (for severe needs).
- **Many families are leaving Hong Kong, or being torn apart,** because there are insufficient education options for NCS SEN children here.
- **Parents are stressed out** with the lack of choice, stigma and lack of future opportunity for children with SEN. This has raised the risk of domestic violence, marriage breakdowns and alcoholism in families.
- **NCS SEN children are faced with the “double whammy” of language pressure and special needs.** Giving such children no choice but to learn in Cantonese is unfair and unjust.
- There are **no English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) public special schools** in Hong Kong.
- **There is only one EMI private special school** and it has a long waiting list. It is also too expensive for middle-income and grassroots families to consider.
- **Private schools, at the admissions stage, conduct activities that weed out children with SEN.** The schools claim that this is an “academic” exercise, although it can be seen as discriminatory.
- **Private schools use the excuse that they cannot “cater to” children** with many types of SEN. In numerous cases, parents have been encouraged to “pull them out” of school.
- **Some mainstream private schools claim they are “inclusive”** on their websites, yet fail to live up to expectations. Grassroots families have relied on this information to borrow money for school applications.
- **The best schools cited by parents are ESF schools** based on many factors, including leadership commitment to mainstream SEN students and the ways they adapt teaching based on the level of adjustment required for each child.
- **Public schools find it difficult to determine whether an NCS child has a speech delay** (because he/she may be learning multiple languages) or has SEN.
- **Public school teachers lack experience** in teaching NCS and SEN students and some also tend to have negative stereotypes of ethnic minority children.
- **Schools have problems contacting and communicating with parents.** This can pose a major barrier between ethnic minority parents and their children's education.
- **Hong Kong professionals lack understanding of other cultures.** Hospital Authority psychologists and other specialists, teachers and social workers do not have professional training or personal experiences with people from diverse cultures.
- **English-speaking professionals are very expensive** and grassroots families are unable to afford them.
- **Parents across all income levels find it very difficult to find assistance** and resources, and are mostly disappointed with the EDB.



Recommendations

Big Picture Recommendations for the HKSARG



- Establish a high-level Inclusion Team to look at how economic growth objectives of One Belt, One Road; Creativity and Innovation; and remaining an international city, will be met through inclusion of talent.
- Develop a cross-departmental approach to NCS residents to streamline processes and assistance to this community.
- Continue to include the NCS community in HKSARG advisory committees and sub-committees.

Social Welfare Department (SWD) to Improve Access to Early Intervention for Children Below 6



- Develop more English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) Early Education Training Centres (EETCs) for those with mild or moderate SEN.
- Develop EMI Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs) for those with severe needs.
- Make public the waiting times for placement and assessments in EETCs and SCCC.

EDB to Increase School Places for NCS SEN Children



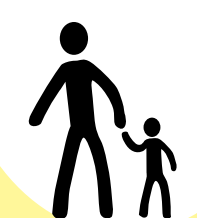
- Open at least one EMI public special school.
- Encourage more EMI private schools.

EDB to Strengthen Its Commitment to NCS SEN Children



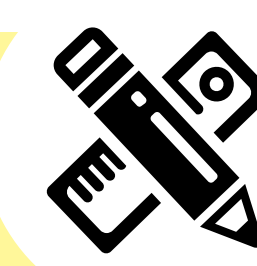
- Require public schools to have websites in English, not just in Cantonese.
- Revamp the EDB website's section on SEN education to include parent-centred information and consistent language on SEN.
- Track the numbers of SEN and NCS SEN students in all schools, including private schools, on a half-yearly basis.
- Give NCS parents the choice to transfer their children from a CMI to an EMI school if they are diagnosed with or suspected of having SEN.

EDB to Better Engage and Educate NCS Parents



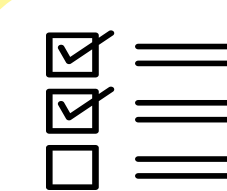
- Develop internal guidelines for schools on making contact and communicating with NCS parents.
- Develop a Community Connectors Network that individual schools and NGOs can access in order to assist parents.
- Develop standardised materials for schools and NGOs to use to communicate with parents in English and other languages.

EDB to Enhance Inclusion at Private Schools



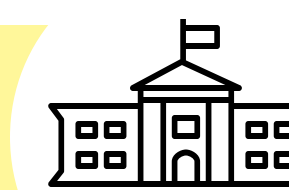
- The EDB to publicly state its “zero tolerance” for discrimination in schools.
- Work with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to enhance outreach and training to private schools regarding the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO) and also develop a “Code of Conduct for Private Schools on SEN”.
- Private schools to develop a 5-year strategy on the inclusion of the SEN community and submit it to the EDB at the start of 2018/2019 school year.
- Land lease renewals to be considered in light of the numbers, types and nature of equal opportunity complaints made against the schools.
- Consider allowing schools' “scholarship” monies to be used for SEN support

Hospital Authority: Is it a Speech Delay or SEN?



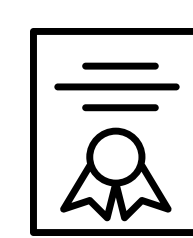
- Further study to determine if a child has a speech delay or SEN, especially in the ethnic minority community. This should also look at international experiences.
- In the meantime, bring in experts to share experiences and provide training.

Private Schools



- Full transparency required regarding the admission of SEN children.
- Review their admissions processes to ensure compliance with DDO.

Upskilling Teachers and Enhancing Specialist Skills

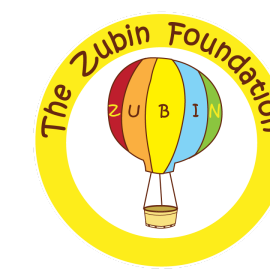


- All teachers are to have a mandatory SEN component in their teacher training qualification.
- Develop a talent plan required to serve the needs of the NCS SEN community.
- New 3-year funded scheme for secondary school teachers, enabling them to learn about teaching second language to students who have special needs.

Hospital Authority & Department of Health



- Make public the waiting times for SEN children to see a psychologist or other specialists.
- Ensure that the new Child Assessment Centre includes members from the NCS community.
- Address the lack of English-language fluency of public health care specialists. English proficiency is necessary to conduct assessments and meaningfully engage with NCS children and their families.



Legal Considerations for Parents and Schools

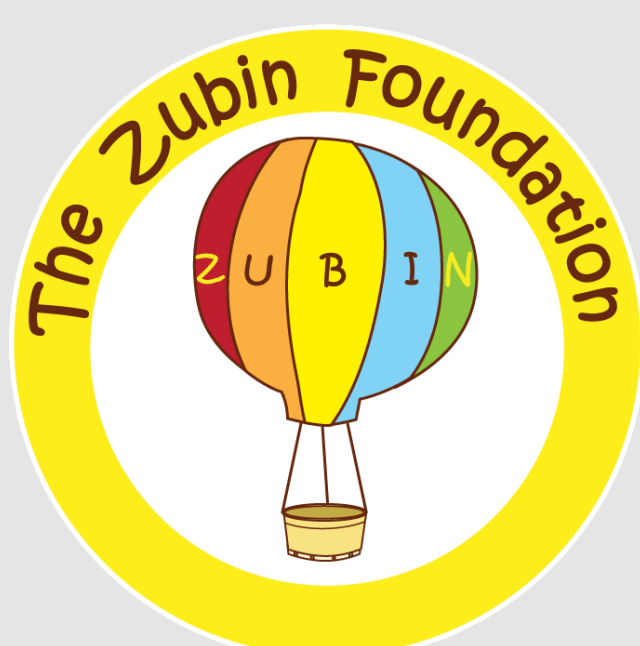
- Equal educational opportunities are the rights of all children, including **all** SEN children.
- Hong Kong is bound by the *Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities* (CRPD) and the *Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD).
- *Discrimination* against children with disability by educational establishments is unlawful under Hong Kong law (*Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO)*; *Code of Practice on Education (CoPE)*).
- Mere physical access in a school setting in which a child with SEN cannot meaningfully participate due to language and other barriers does not alone fulfil legal obligations which schools are under.
- Discrimination on grounds of language contravenes the *Race Discrimination Ordinance* (RDO). The exemption of medium of instruction cannot apply when an entire class of children is effectively excluded from *any* meaningful engagement in the education system at all, public or private.
- Parents are entitled to early identification, necessary referral, treatment and rehabilitative services and support for children with SEN under the public health care system.
- Under the *integrated education (IE)* policy and *whole school approach (WSA)* to providing an effective learning environment for all children, all schools are required to provide an inclusive environment and learning adaptations suitable to children with SEN (*Parent Guide on Whole School Approach to Integrated Education* and the *Operation Guide on the WSA to IE*).
- The effectiveness and success of IE and WSA are critically dependent on ensuring that assessment tools for identification, treatment plans and school curricula to facilitate individual education plans for children with SEN are available in a language that they are receptive to and versed in. A failure to ensure such accessibility strikes at the heart of the education system's commitment to the realisation of inclusive education and an equal right to education for *all* children and in contravention to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) but also, CRPD and CERD.
- In a case where the inaccessibility pertains to a non-Chinese speaking child with SEN, this constitutes a form of indirect racial discrimination based on language.
- Parental consent is required in any education plan considered suitable and recommended for a SEN child. This is to enhance the receptivity and responsiveness of the child to the programme and is dependent on parental collaboration.
- *The School Development Accountability Framework* requires all government and aided schools to conduct an evaluation of their policies and measures, including support provided for SEN children. This is verified through the EDB's external review of the school and annual self-evaluation reports filed by the school on the implementation of the WSA and IE.
- Government and aided schools are required by the EDB to identify in their annual reports the specific use of resources deployed to enhance learning opportunities for SEN children.
- In the event of a dispute between government and aided schools and parents, a 3-tier mediation mechanism (the School-Based Complaint Procedure, Mediation Mechanism of the EDB and Case Study Group) has been established by the EDB to resolve it.

The perspectives on the legal implications of education policy for NCS SEN children presented on this page were contributed by:

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