

**Notes of the
Ninth Meeting of the Commission on Children**

Date : 28 January 2021
Time : 2:30 p.m.
Venue : Online

Present

Chairperson

Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung Chief Secretary for Administration (CS)

Vice-chairperson

Dr Law Chi-kwong Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW)

Ex-officio Members

Dr Christine Choi Under Secretary for Education (USED)
(for Secretary for Education)

Mr Jack Chan Under Secretary for Home Affairs (USHA)
(for Secretary for Home Affairs)

Mr Chris Fung Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Health)3 (PAS(H)3)
(for Secretary for Food and Health)

Ms Judy Chung Principal Assistant Secretary (Constitutional and Mainland Affairs)5
(for Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs)

Ms Pang Kit-ling Assistant Director (Family & Child Welfare) (AD(F&CW))
(for Director of Social Welfare)

Dr Thomas Chung Consultant Community Medicine (Family & Student Health) (ConCM(F&SH))
(for Director of Health)

Mr Howard Yam	Assistant Director of Home Affairs (3)
	(on behalf of Director of Home Affairs)
Ms Chan Yuen-han	Chairperson of Women's Commission

Non-official Members

Mr Peter Au Yeung Wai-hong
Miss Bakar Fariha Salma Deiya
Miss Cheng Hui-kiu
Ms Janus Cheng
Mr Dennis Ho Chi-kuen
Dr Patrick Ip
Dr Sanly Kam Shau-wan
Mr Edwin Lee
Mrs Priscilla Lui Tsang Sun-kai
Ms Shalini Mahtani
Mr Kenny Ng Kwan-lim
Dr Halina Poon Suk-han
Ms Susan So Suk-yin
Ms Michelle Tam Chi-yun
Mr Gary Wong Chi-him
Dr Lilian Wong Hiu-lei

Secretary

Mr Andrew Tsang	Secretary (Commission on Children) (Acting)
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In attendance

Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office

Miss Carrie Chang	Administrative Assistant to Chief Secretary for Administration
Mr Alex Chan	Press Secretary to Chief Secretary for Administration
Ms Kathy Siu	Political Assistant to Chief Secretary for Administration

Labour and Welfare Bureau

Ms Chang King-yiu	Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Mr David Leung	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) ¹
Ms Terry Cheung	Chief Executive Officer (Commission on Children)

Education Bureau (EDB)

Mrs Iris Kwong [For item 3 only]	Principal Education Officer (Kindergarten Education) (PEO(KGE))
Dr Shek Pui-yee [For item 3 only]	Senior Curriculum Development Officer (Chinese) ³ (SCDO(Chinese) ³)
Ms Jennifer Young [For item 3 only]	Senior Inspector (Special Education Support 2) ² (SI(SSES) ²)
Dr Verena Lau [For item 4 only]	Principal Assistant Secretary (School Development_Special Tasks) PAS(SD_ST)

Members absent with apologies

Prof Daniel Shek Tan-lei	Chairperson of Family Council
Mr Winson Chow Wai-chung	
Ms Kathy Chung Lai-kam	
Dr Sandra Tsang Kit-man	
Ms Kathy Wong Kin-ho	
Dr Wong Kwai-yau	

CS welcomed all Members to the ninth meeting of the Commission on Children (CoC). He informed Members that Ms Annie Kong, the Secretary of CoC, had recently left the civil service. Mr Andrew Tsang had taken up the role of the Secretary on a temporary basis in addition to his own duties.

Item 1: Confirmation of the Notes of the Eighth Meeting held on 13 November 2020

2. The draft notes of the eighth meeting were circulated to Members on 17 December 2020 and no comment had been received. The notes were confirmed without any amendment.

Item 2: Matters arising

3. CS advised that an information note titled “Stakeholder Engagement Programme for 2021” had been circulated for Members’ reference. The Secretariat would assist in the conduct of the public engagement sessions, preferably in a face-to-face format if feasible, on a quarterly basis in accordance with the engagement programme. The first public engagement session on supporting children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder was conducted online on 23 January 2021.

4. CS invited the Secretary to update the meeting on some Members’ previous suggestion to redefine the work of certain Working Groups (WGs) so as to achieve better synergy between public engagement and the on-going consultancy studies and research on children-related policy issues. The Secretary reported that under the existing arrangement, the WG on Research and Public Engagement was responsible for coordinating engagement topics proposed by other WGs and putting up the proposed topics to CoC for approval of an annual public engagement programme. It also oversaw the conduct of the engagement sessions with advice from the proponent WGs. A meeting was arranged on 22 December 2020 for Convenors / Vice-convenors of the four WGs to consider an alternative arrangement under which the WG on Promotion of Children’s Rights and Development, Education and Publicity would take up the above-mentioned function from the WG on Research and Public Engagement. As no consensus could be reached, it was agreed at the meeting that the status quo should be maintained.

Item 3: Enhancing Education and Inclusion of Ethnic Minority Children [Paper No. 01/2021]

5. Ms Susan So declared interest as her organisation (Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children) had been running 17 kindergarten-cum-child care centres, of which nine had admitted non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students and received the grant by the Education Bureau (EDB).

6. On CS's invitation, PEO(KGE), SCDO(Chinese)³ and SI(SES2)² of EDB briefed Members on the measures and enhancements implemented by EDB in establishing an inclusive education environment in schools to prepare NCS students for further studies and work, with a view to integrating them into the local community.

7. Members' views and suggestions were summarised as follows –

(a) Learning and teaching of Chinese

- (i) The implementation of the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” (the Learning Framework) should be supplemented with stage learning objectives with assessment indicators for reference by teachers and NCS students. With regard to a review on the effectiveness of the Learning Framework conducted between 2015 and 2018, EDB was requested to provide the findings for Members' information. A Member also asked whether EDB had set any minimum requirements for schools to adopt the Learning Framework in terms of the number of NCS students admitted.
- (ii) On the use of romanisation for NCS students to learn Cantonese, its effectiveness should not be underestimated taking into account the successful experience of learning Mandarin with romanisation in Mainland and Taiwan. EDB should consider standardising a romanisation system for Cantonese for easier learning and teaching.
- (iii) Regarding the provision of a one-off grant to each school admitting NCS students to cater for the implementation of the “Adapted Framework of the Chinese History Curriculum (S1-3) (2019)” for NCS students, the given budget was considered relatively low for individual schools to develop their own bilingual learning resources and offer professional

development programmes to teachers. To effectively utilise the resources, it was proposed to centralise the funds and commission a professional body to provide the services.

- (b) Support for NCS students of primary and secondary schools
 - (i) The after-school Chinese language programme should only be regarded as a supplement to support Chinese learning for NCS students. EDB should continue to provide recurrent school-based support to cater for their learning needs.
 - (ii) It was suggested to offer post-secondary Chinese programme for NCS students in order to increase their Chinese proficiency, thereby enhancing their upward mobility and expanding career choices. In light of NCS students' growing interests to pursue careers in the health and technology fields, the Vocational Training Council (VTC) should develop programmes for NCS students in these sectors. VTC should also organise training courses for teachers and various sectors to learn the culture and languages of ethnic minority (EM) to enhance mutual communication.
- (c) Support for NCS students studying in kindergartens (KGs)
 - (i) Regarding the one-off Website Enhancement Grant for KGs joining the KG education scheme (Scheme-KGs) to revamp their school websites to provide bilingual information, sustainable support from EDB should be in place to facilitate their continual updating of information.
 - (ii) EDB should review the training target of requiring at least one teacher in each Scheme-KG admitting eight or more NCS students to attend the recognised basic course related to teaching Chinese to NCS students, given that the proportion of trained teacher to NCS students would reduce as more NCS students were admitted.
 - (iii) Under the five-tiered grant for Scheme-KGs, the current grant rate (i.e. \$50,000 per year) for KGs with admission of one to four NCS students was considered insufficient as expenses on certain items such as procurement of translation services were fixed costs regardless of the number of NCS students

admitted. EDB was requested to review the financial support for those KGs admitting only a few number of NCS students.

- (iv) While KGs were encouraged to employ NCS Teaching Assistants (TAs) to assist in the translation of teaching materials into different EM languages, a Member was concerned if KGs were provided with the resources or funding for the purpose. On the other hand, as part and parcel of an inclusive policy, the Government should encourage and train up NCS students to be professionals in various sectors instead of merely taking up supporting positions in their career pursuits.
 - (v) Research findings had shown that language learning should commence at an early age. The Government was suggested to provide appropriate support to young children (aged between 2 and 3) in learning Chinese.
 - (vi) Training for school social workers stationed in KGs should be strengthened to better support NCS families and students.
 - (vii) In light of children's development pattern, the principle of "starting with listening and speaking" was adopted at the KG stage, followed by the development of writing and reading skills at primary school stage. With the difference in learning focus, the Government should provide adequate support for schools, NCS families and students to ensure a seamless transition from KG to Primary One. A Member also asked the reasons for a drop in the percentage of NCS students in Primary One comparing to that in KG.
- (d) Support for NCS parents
- (i) The Government should step up the supportive measures for NCS families in addition to the routine parent education programmes such as talks and seminars. Five Parents Resource Centres subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had been set up with specialised EM units to support NCS families. EDB could help disseminate such information to NCS parents (particularly those with children with special educational needs (SEN)) in collaboration with other non-governmental organisations and

through EDB's website to maximise its support for NCS families.

(e) Support for NCS students with SEN

- (i) 435 NCS students were admitted to special schools in the 2019/20 school year. A Member enquired if further breakdown of these NCS students by ethnicity and special needs, etc. was available for understanding the overall picture.

(f) Cultivation of an inclusive society in Hong Kong

- (i) The Government and various stakeholders in the society should share the same vision of embracing social inclusion. The concept should outline service delivery by government bureaux/ departments (B/Ds). Public education on social inclusion should also be enhanced.
 - (ii) Education on the Race Discrimination Ordinance could be made compulsory in schools to raise children's awareness of the importance of respecting people of difference races and cultures.
- (g) To give Members a better understanding on the effectiveness of the initiatives implemented by the Government, it was suggested that the Government should include outcome measures assessed on four aspects, viz. "Vision", "Objective", "Strategy" and "Efficacy" in future meeting papers as far as possible. By way of example, the data on the employment situations and post-secondary schooling of NCS students could serve as indicators on the effectiveness of inclusive measures.
- (h) A Member suggested setting up a platform with participation from CoC Members, community stakeholders, schools and parents to better support EM children and families in times of need such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. USED made the following responses –

- (i) The primary objective of the Learning Framework was to help NCS students to learn Chinese progressively in a "small-step" approach with a view to bridging them to the mainstream Chinese Language classes as early as possible.

EDB did not consider the formulation of a separate curriculum/ learning objectives with a different level beneficial to NCS students. There was no minimum requirement on the number of NCS students admitted in each school as a prerequisite for the implementation of the Learning Framework. As for the review of the Learning Framework, the refined Framework had been adopted after completion of review in 2019, with minor revisions to certain descriptions of the learning outcomes.

- (ii) According to experts' advice, the development of a Cantonese romanisation system would make it difficult for NCS students to learn Chinese as the extra set of symbols had no connection to the form and meaning of the Chinese characters and words.
- (iii) With regard to the suggestion to offer post-secondary Chinese programmes and vocation training programmes specifically for NCS students, EDB would explore the feasibility of the proposal subject to the readiness of NCS graduates.
- (iv) The variance between the percentage of NCS students studying in KGs and admitted to Primary One could be attributed to a number of factors (e.g. students receiving KG education outside Hong Kong, parents' decision of choosing non-local schools, etc.). To facilitate smooth transition of Chinese learning for NCS students from KGs to Primary One, schools would design different modes of learning activities to suit the characteristics and needs of these students.
- (v) The after-school Chinese support programmes were devised in collaboration with the tertiary institutions to cater for the learning needs of NCS students with reference to the Learning Framework. EDB would review the allocation of resources as and when necessary to provide schools with appropriate support.
- (vi) The Website Enhancement Grant for KGs was a measure to help schools to better support NCS parents and children. Depending on the development, EDB would consider seeking additional resources to enhance the support in this regard.

- (vii) The categorisation of 435 NCS students by types of special schools was based on the special education needs of the students at the time of school placement. The breakdown of the figures by special school type and by ethnicity was shown in the Annex to Paper No. 01/2021.
- (viii) It was encouraging to see a remarkable increase in the number of NCS students being admitted to the mainstream schools, and that schools had been proactively nurturing NCS alumni to partake in the education sector. While it might not be able to quantify the effectiveness of the education initiatives with a set of indicators, EDB had all along been collecting and consolidating data and statistics for reference purpose.
- (ix) EDB encouraged the early learning of the Chinese language by NCS children and had taken various measures to integrate them into the mainstream schools and society. EDB would continue to strengthen the support for schools, NCS children and families, including developing resources for shared use by schools; encouraging NCS parents to enrol their children in local KGs with an environment conducive to learning Chinese; and strengthening home-school cooperation and parents' education programmes, etc.

9. USHA said that the Home Affairs Bureau and Leisure and Cultural Services Department had all along been committed to promoting diversity and inclusion when designing venues and delivering public services.

10. PEO(KGE) and SCDO(Chinese)³ supplemented with the following responses –

- (i) The “Applied Learning Chinese (for NCS)” courses, with strong linkages to daily life and work contexts, were designed specifically for NCS students. Three courses were currently offered to NCS students to help them apply the Chinese language skills acquired from these courses in their daily life as well as for use in their pursuit of different professional and vocational fields.
- (ii) With respect to the teaching of Chinese History to NCS students, EDB had commissioned tertiary institutions to develop the teaching and learning resources, and offer

professional development programmes and school-based support for teachers, in addition to the provision of grants to schools.

- (iii) On the professional development for teachers of KGs admitting NCS students, EDB had set an achievable training target as a start. The teachers who have attended the basic training course should share the knowledge and skills acquired with other teachers in their serving KGs. EDB would continue to provide more training to teachers having regard to the needs and circumstances.

Item 4: Government's Strategy for Schools Closure during COVID-19 [Paper No. 02/2021]

11. On CS' invitation, USED and PAS(SD_ST) of EDB briefed Members on the Government's arrangement on the suspension of face-to-face classes in the 2020/21 school year as well as the protection and support measures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest development on issues raised by Members under the agenda item "Support for Children in the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic" at the seventh CoC meeting on 25 May 2020 were also covered in this context.

12. Members' views and suggestions were summarised as follows –

(a) The Government's policies

- (i) The Government should be more transparent on the class suspension policy. The rationale behind the suspension decision and other related arrangements (e.g. lunch, examinations, learning activities, etc.) should be clearly explained to allay public concerns.
- (ii) A few effective and rapid screening tests for children including KGs children had become available. The Government should consider conducting coronavirus testing for teachers and other school staff ahead of the resumption of face-to-face classes and arrange the testing on a regular basis. Partial suspension of face-to-face classes could be implemented in individual classes or schools based on the test results.

- (iii) While giving flexibility for schools in making administrative arrangement on suspension of face-to-face classes, EDB should give clear guidelines to schools for aligning the suspension and related support arrangement across the board as far as possible in order to avoid confusion to parents.
- (iv) The Government should consider setting up a task force to support schools in combating COVID-19, as a platform for stakeholders and experts to work in collaboration to effectively and efficiently support schools based on their needs relating to the suspension/ resumption of face-to-face classes.
- (v) While various measures were taken by the Government to support children's learning at home, a Member considered that it would be useful to draw reference to the statistics on the beneficiaries (e.g. the target and number) for better understanding whether all children including those from grass-root families were benefiting from such measures.
- (vi) Teaching staff felt stressed about providing extra support to students and parents in addition to their online/ face-to-face teaching work. A Member suggested that EDB should consider suspending the regular inspection for quality assurance until full resumption of face-to-face classes to relieve the stress of teaching staff.
- (vii) Consideration should be given to relax the eligibility requirement of relevant subsidy, such as the Working Family Allowance Scheme, as some parents might have to spend more time at home to take care of their children during the prolonged suspension of face-to-face classes and thus failed to meet the requirement on the minimum work hours.

(b) Impact to students and their families

- (i) Prolonged suspension of face-to-face classes had posed challenges to children's education, mental health, social and personal development. The problems were worse in KGs which had face-to-face classes suspended for the longest period of time comparing to secondary and primary schools. Given the Government's appeal for the public to stay at home amid the pandemic, parents normally would not take their

children to schools though they remained open. It was stressful for these parents to take care of the children round the clock while working from home. The Government should consider partly resuming face-to-face classes in KGs.

- (ii) The increasing use of electronic devices for online learning might affect not only children's eyesight and sleep, but also their mental health. Children were also at a higher risk of being abused at home during the pandemic as parents might suffer from stress or emotion disturbances while taking care of their children at home for a prolonged period.
- (iii) Young students, in particular those from underprivileged families, had encountered more difficulties in online learning from home owing to the lack of study space, poor internet connection, insufficient or outdated hardware and lack of technical support from adults if both parents were working. EM families were also hard hit as they were not used to the "new normal" of video interview for school admission during the pandemic.
- (iv) Some parents had to quit their job or reduce their working hours to take care of their children at home during suspension of face-to-face classes. This has led to a decrease in family income and caused financial and emotional distress. More child care services should be provided.
- (v) A Member raised concerns about the significant growth in cyber crimes involving children as victims as they spent more time online during the suspension of face-to-face classes. Examples included child pornography, sex crimes and naked chat extortion. Action should be taken to increase children's awareness on the threats online and how to use the internet safely. Information on how to handle online crimes and where to seek help should also be disseminated.
- (vi) A Member shared with the meeting that his research team had been working on a three-year study funded by the University Grants Committee to track the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health of families with children in Hong Kong, in particular their mental health. The figures and findings would be shared with the CoC and relevant B/Ds.

- (viii) With the closure of recreational facilities and schools, children from grass-root families had limited sources of entertainment and insufficient space for leisure activities and exercise. Students could be arranged to participate in activities and sports requiring no physical contacts, e.g. badminton, under safe conditions in schools or other suitable venues.

(c) Support to students and their families

- (i) A Member was concerned that children from underprivileged families might have difficulty accessing reading books owing to suspension of face-to-face classes and closure of public libraries. Another Member raised concerns about hygiene and health when children shared reading resources and books of the reading scheme initiated by EDB under the pandemic.
- (ii) Schools should proactively provide support to students and parents at risk (such as students with SEN), and teachers/school social workers should meet parents and children at schools on a need basis to offer direct support. As online learning or online rehabilitation training were not very effective for students with SEN, the Government should encourage special schools to facilitate the return to school of students with SEN for receiving face-to-face training subject to proper health precautionary measures being put in place.
- (iii) Children studying in K2 and children with SEN having difficulties in keeping up the learning progress due to prolonged suspension of face-to-face classes should be allowed to repeat a year if so recommended by psychologists after evaluation. EDB should also provide resources to support online teaching of KGs.
- (iv) A Member was concerned that mental health problems among students of different ages were becoming more prevalent during the pandemic. The Government was suggested to assess students' mental health conditions and provide follow-up support services to those needy students.
- (v) Schools should give clear instructions to teachers on the work arrangement during suspension of face-to-face classes, e.g. whether online teaching could be conducted from home or at

schools. Provision of training and support to teaching staff on online teaching was important to maintain the teaching quality and students' learning progress. Training for teachers to identify the mental health problems of students during online learning was also required.

- (vi) Members expressed appreciation to the Government and various sectors in the society, including schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs, for the substantial and concerted efforts in supporting children and parents during the pandemic. Consideration might be given to record the efforts for future reference.

13. USED made the following responses -

- (a) Children's health was always the top priority. The Government took into account of the pandemic situation, advice of medical experts and readiness of schools in deciding the suspension / resumption of face-to-face classes including the arrangements on lunch and learning activities. The Government also requested schools to closely observe the health guidelines and put in place appropriate precautionary measures to safeguard the health of the students and teachers. A reporting mechanism was established between EDB and the Centre for Health Protection to handle confirmed/ preliminary confirmed and close contact cases.
- (b) On access to children's reading books, EDB had disbursed a Promotion of Reading Grant (Grant) to all public sector schools since the 2018/19 school year with the objective of supporting schools to promote reading. Schools could use the Grant to purchase books for their students according to their needs. The Grant had been extended to cover KGs starting from the 2019/20 school year.
- (c) EDB acknowledged the various challenges faced by children and families in particular those of disadvantaged families amid the pandemic and suspension of face-to-face classes. While EDB had been providing various support to disadvantaged primary and secondary students, such as one-off top-up grant to subsidise schools for purchasing portable Wi-Fi routers, subsidy for purchasing mobile computer devices through Community Care Fund, etc., EDB would continue to observe the needs of the students and take follow-up actions to support them as appropriate. On the

other hand, schools including KGs remained open under the pandemic to look after children who lacked carers to take care of them at home. Measures such as conducting COVID-19 tests would be explored to facilitate resumption of face-to-face classes.

14. PAS(H)3 provided the following information –

- (a) Since July 2020, the Advisory Committee on Mental Health had launched a “Shall We Talk” initiative with the aim to promote mental health and enhance the awareness of the public on their own mental health and that of people around them. Through dissemination of information and resources relating to mental health on online platform, teenagers aged 12 to 17 were encouraged to show care to their friends and families.
- (b) As announced in the 2020 Policy Address, a total amount of \$300 million had been reserved under the Beat Drugs Fund over three years to strengthen the support to people with mental health problems resulting from the pandemic in collaboration with NGOs. Stress and mental health problems of students and their parents during suspension of face-to-face classes would also be addressed.

15. CS remarked that it was imperative to follow up on the significant growth in cyber crimes involving children as victims. He would invite the Police to contact the Member concerned to devise possible measures to tackle the problem. As the Chairperson of the Fight Crime Committee, he would direct the Committee to follow up on the issue. Information on actions taken by B/Ds regarding cyber crimes involving children would also be provided to Members after the meeting.

[Post-meeting Note: The Police shared with the Member concerned on 2 February 2021 the immediate and mid-term measures for tackling cyber crimes involving children as victims. Separately, a summary of discussion on the actions taken by SWD, the Police and EDB in response to the relevant issues as discussed at the meeting of Committee on Child Abuse on 15 January 2021 was sent to Members for reference.]

**Item 5: Progress Reports of the Working Groups
[Paper No. 03 – 06/2021]**

16. The meeting endorsed the recommendations on the applications under the Funding Scheme for Children's Well-being and Development 2020/21. The meeting also noted the progress reports of the WG on Children Protection [Paper No. 03/2021], WG on Working Group on Promotion of Children's Rights and Development, Education and Publicity [Paper No. 04/2021], WG on Research and Public Engagement [Paper No. 05/2021] and WG on Children with Specific Needs [Paper No. 06/02021].

Item 6: Any Other Business (AOB)

17. On CS' invitation, the Secretary updated Members on the development on the following items which were raised at the last meeting under AOB –

- (a) With regard to the alleged malpractice of hostels under Hong Chi Association, SWD had issued a written reply to the Member regarding her concerns on the case involving Hong Chi Children Home (匡智之家). Separately, EDB was following up on the investigation into the case involving the hostel of Hong Chi Pinehill No.2 School (匡智松嶺第二校宿舍) and would report to the WG on Children with Specific Needs in due course.
- (b) As regards another Member's concerns about the delay in making reports by child abuse survivors, the issue had been discussed at the meeting of the WG on Children Protection on 13 January 2021.

18. In response to a Member's suggestion to discuss the Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill at the last meeting as well as this meeting, SLW advised that in the past public consultation exercise, the percentage of views in support of the proposed legislation was about the same as that opposing it, while there was consensus that the Government should enhance its support services for separated/ divorced families. In this regard, five Specialised Co-parenting Centres were set up in October 2019 to provide one-stop support services for families in need. The Government would keep in view stakeholders' receptiveness to the legislative proposal and consider whether and if so, the appropriate timing to pursue the legislation.

19. A Member suggested to discuss at a future CoC meeting the need of formulating a holistic child policy framework to better safeguard the rights and well-being of children, by reviewing if there were any gaps under existing child policies that merit enhancement and/or integration.

20. Members noted that the next meeting was scheduled for 7 May 2021. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:35 p.m.

**Commission on Children Secretariat
March 2021**