

The Education of Children of Ethnic Minorities

Submission to the Education Panel, Legislative Council

Civic Party

Preface

The right to education of the minorities is protected by article 39 of the Basic Law which provides that the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights shall be implemented through the laws of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“HKSAR”). In addition, the HKSAR should implement the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination applicable to Hong Kong. In particular, article 5(e)(v) provides that State Parties to the convention should guarantee the right to education and training of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin. To facilitate the HKSAR to carry out its constitutional duties mentioned above, the Civic Party makes the following recommendations on the policy of the education of minorities (including those of Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese origins).

- 1) Provide information for selecting schools and education system in multi-languages

Committee on Home-school Cooperation publishes the Primary and Secondary School Profiles (“the profiles”) every year. However, the contents are mostly in Chinese. The Education and Manpower Bureau (“EMB”) has the responsibility to encourage primary and secondary schools to provide information about their schools in English and minority ethnic languages. If schools fail to do so, the EMB should arrange to have the profiles and information of the Hong Kong education system translated into English and minority ethnic languages to facilitate students and parents of ethnic minorities to select the most suitable schools.

- 2) Take into account the pattern of minorities' population and EMI schools regarding the establishment of "resource schools"

In principle, the Civic Party supports the policy of turning some mainstream schools into "resource schools" according to the Schools' Professional Collaboration Project. However, if only one to two schools in the five main districts are selected to participate in this programme, we are worried that the population pattern of children of minorities and the opportunities of the minority students enrolling in EMI School would not be taken into consideration. In some districts where there is a high population of minority students (such as the Yau Tsim Mong and Yuen Long Districts), they may be forced to attend schools in other districts far away from home. They may also fail to enter mainstream EMI schools because of fewer quota available.

We urge the EMB to determine whether the number of "resource schools" and their locations are decided in accordance with the most updated population pattern of ethnic minorities. In addition, we urge the EMB to implement the Schools' Professional Collaboration Project as soon as possible such that mainstream schools which accept more minority students in the school year 2006-07 are provided with more resources and supports.

- 3) Establish a separate Chinese-as-second-language curriculum for minority students

Chinese should be recognised as a second language for minority students. Therefore, the EMB should design an appropriate "Chinese as a Second Language ("CSL")" curriculum for minority students. At present, minority students' abilities to read and write Chinese are seriously insufficient. This shows that the EMB should completely change its past measures for adjusting the Chinese curriculum. We also suggest that after the CSL curriculum has been implemented, the EMB should design a suitable HKCEE paper for the Chinese subject, similar to the division of the English subject into syllabi A and B. This will allow minority students to have a fair opportunity to obtain a passing grade in the Chinese subject.

- 4) Eliminate Chinese from being a prerequisite for postsecondary education

At present, passing the Chinese subject in the HKCEE is a prerequisite for entering the programmes of vocational schools, associate degrees and universities. This, in effect, ensures that minority students are excluded from postsecondary education, thereby creating an obstacle in their career path, especially in the knowledge-oriented job market.

Therefore, we suggest that the EMB should discuss with the tertiary institutions to consider relaxing the entering requirement for programmes which are taught in English. For example, minority students should be exempted from satisfying the requirement of passing the Chinese subject in the HKCEE.

5) Provide more English-taught courses in tertiary institutions

To ensure that minority students finishing the HKCEE have a fair opportunity to enroll in postsecondary programmes (such as those mentioned above), the respective tertiary institutions should provide more courses with English as the teaching medium and implement programmes to encourage communication and studying support among students of different ethnic origins. This will not deprive Chinese students the opportunity to obtain postsecondary education. Students will also have a chance to experience a multi-cultural postsecondary life which will promote the long term harmony among people of different ethnic origins. In addition, minority students will be able to acquire the necessary skills and enter the job market, thereby smoothly integrating into the society.

6) Provide on-job training for minorities

About 45% of the working population of minorities are employed in non-technical, low-skilled jobs such as being a security guard. These types of jobs offer low wages and few holidays but require long working hours. Therefore, even if they intend to improve their Chinese and other skills, they cannot afford to spend the time and money to break the language barrier and enhance their opportunities in employment.

We urge the EMB to cooperate with the Labour Department to provide on-job training for minority workers currently employed in non-technical jobs. They should also subsidise the employers of those workers such that they can hire substitute workers and will be willing to let their employees to participate in training programmes.

7) Establish an “interpretation hotline” for parents of minority students

One of the major problems that mainstream schools with minority students face is the difficulty in communication between teachers and parents of those students. On the one hand, teachers have great difficulty in communicating with parents who speak neither Chinese nor English. On the other hand, due to language difficulty, parents cannot effectively express their needs and concerns.

It is recommended that following the success in the Australian case, the EMB should establish an “interpretation hotline” to provide interpretation services in Urdu, Nepali, Hindi and Punjabi, so as to facilitate communication between minority students, parents and teachers.

8) Encourage professional exchanges and reward “harmonious education”

Frontline teachers of the Hong Kong education sector have been working hard for years to help minority students to integrate into the mainstream curriculum. They have also adopted various special and innovative teaching methods to promote the values of harmony and tolerance among different ethnic groups.

To show our appreciation for their contributions, we suggest that an “Education Award for Racial Harmony” should be established. In addition, an online platform should be set up to allow teachers to share their experience and ideas on promoting harmony and tolerance in schools.

The Civic Party  
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