


Panel on Education
Legislative Council

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Mui Wo
Lantau Island

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Provision of School Places in South Lantau

Comments submitted to the Education Panel Meeting, 14 February, 2011

I am a permanent resident of Hong Kong and this is home for me nearly 30 years. I am a teacher and have taught both local and international primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

I wish to point out that **the government's provision of school places is inadequate and inappropriate for our community, and the non-Chinese speaking children suffer the most in this respect.**

There are three main problems in the EDB's calculation of student number/school places:

1. NCS children studying in the local international schools are excluded;
2. NCS children commuting to schools outside the community due to lack of places locally are not included;
3. NCS children attending local schools can only be treated as places 'available', not places 'suitable' for NCS children's learning needs, causing further 'loss' of students.

Inadequate and inappropriate educational services for NCS children

Problem with learning Chinese Language and Chinese medium of instruction (MOI)

My son and daughter have both received good ESF education to which I am grateful. The only problem they face is their inability to read and write Chinese. This has obstructed them from fully integrating into a predominately Chinese-speaking community in Hong Kong. Many of their classmates and friends are having similar problems.

Now, my grandchildren are second generation of Hong Kong citizens and they are attending a local school. Although they are more able than their parents to read and write Chinese, their academic performance suffers since most of the time, they cannot understand their teachers teaching in Cantonese, and their mind shuts off. By the time the teacher switches to English, their motivation to learn has long gone. This is common experience to many NCS children I have taught.

This also causes low academic performance, misbehavior, and racial prejudice (SCMP, 3 January 2011, see attached) because they tend to be perceived as ‘trouble-makers’ and ‘low-achievers’. It shouldn’t be like that. They are assets to a cosmopolitan city like Hong Kong, not a problem. All they need is an opportunity to learn and socialize properly (SCMP, 27 December 2010)!!

Working around many a limitation, the school principal and teachers have done the best they can with little improvement. Consequently, an undercurrent of discontent is felt.

Meanwhile, over 60 NCS families who cannot afford the high ESF fees and travel costs or time have opted out of school. I fully sympathize with these families since it perhaps is the only way they can preserve their children’s self-esteem and passion to learning.

Hence, a new school model, I believe, is required to accommodate these children in a local school framework. I came across the school plan produced by the South Lantau Education Concern group and I agree that an English-medium school is probably the most effective way to help NCS children to thrive in their multicultural community. This explains why I am a keen supporter of the campaign for reopening of the local secondary school (New Territories Heung Yee Kuk Southern District Secondary School -- SDSS) in Mui Wo.

An English-medium school for a multicultural community is the solution

The newly designed local school in Mui Wo advocates:

1. Flexible teaching and learning of both languages according to ability groups.
2. Using English medium of teaching to ensure proper understanding of academic subjects.
3. Promoting Chinese-English immersion for non-academic subjects such as Arts, PE, and extra-curricular activities. This will allow collaborations among students of diverse backgrounds to enhance mutual understandings and friendships.
4. Incorporating different cultural activities as an ‘Other Learning Experience’ theme across the calendar year to promote multicultural respect and harmony.

I am confident that if such a school is to be established in South Lantau, the student counts will shoot up as many of them would prefer not to commute long distance to school anymore.

Currently, many NCS students have to get on the early morning ferries (5:55am, 6:20am, 7:00am) then change other transport to school. I met some of those children (about a dozen) regularly on the 5:55am 'slow ferry' (55-minute ride) out, and the 5:40pm or 6:30pm 'slow ferry' back. My heart sank to see their worn-out faces after a long day and a tiring 4-hour round trip! It is silent suffering for our young people and their family!

I am sure if the government officials would see that with their own eyes, they will understand and rectify the situation promptly.

I am most grateful to the honourable members of this Panel for helping us to get our message across to the government. Truly, it is a matter of urgency and cannot be delayed any longer!

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted contact information]

Discrimination

Children show bias against South Asians

One in five local Chinese children surveyed said they were unwilling to make friends with South Asian children. The Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong, which polled 1,228 primary five and six pupils in September and October, found 54 per cent thought Chinese residents *discriminated* against South Asians, and one in six were unwilling to have South Asians as classmates. Staff Reporter

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Divided we fail - Dr. Raees Baig, Manager of Centre for Social Impact, HKCSS (SCMP)

Our government says that it wants a fair and harmonious society in Hong Kong, including the elimination of race discrimination. Most of us would agree that equal opportunity and recognition of personal talent and effort not only improve social stability but help this city achieve its full economic potential as well. These are fine principles. But how are we doing in practice?

Racial harmony is more than just celebrating festivals of different racial groups or eating ethnic food. It is about whether people of different racial groups can enjoy equal opportunities in all aspects of life. After years of debate, the Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) took effect in mid-2009 and according to the Equal Opportunities Commission, there were 39 complaints for investigation in the first eight months of the law.

Feedback from non-governmental organisations suggests that discriminatory practices have not gone down since enactment of the RDO. What is most troubling, perhaps, is that discriminatory practices are still found in government policy, especially in education and the recruitment of civil servants.

This is a major concern. Education for the individual in a knowledge-based society is the key to securing a decent job and livelihood. From the community's perspective, it is an essential investment in human capital and social development. However, ethnic minority children are being marginalised in our education system. Non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in public schools are either being segregated in designated schools or have to struggle in mainstream subsidized schools without sufficient support for learning Chinese. They are further excluded from higher education by Chinese literacy requirements – a barrier many are unable to fulfil.

The Education Bureau allocates special annual grants of HK\$300,000-600,000 to 28



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designated ethnic minority primary and secondary schools. Yet there is no monitoring mechanism on how the schools spend the grant; indeed, the definition of “designated school” is vague. In 2008, 19 primary and secondary schools with more than 30 ethnic minority students each were still not classified as designated schools. That amounts to thousands of NCS students left without support.

Teachers of NCS students face a serious lack of suitable Chinese textbooks, and the current Chinese language curriculum is unsuitable for NCS students. The Government has lobbied local universities to recognise the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Chinese language results for admissions purposes, which is easier than the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (HKDSE) Examination. Unfortunately, the GCSE Chinese language examination is not widely accepted; prior to this year, the application fee was five times higher than for the HKDSE, made it unaffordable for many ethnic minority families. As a result, the university admission rate for NCS students is below 3%, compared with 15-18% for their Chinese counterparts. In 2010, the Government finally agreed to adjust the application fee for GCSE on par the HKDSE level for those eligible candidates, it is hoped that more students could be benefited from the adjustment.

Education is a basic right of every young person and a crucial means to upward social mobility; a barrier to education is a form of discrimination. For NCS students to reach higher education and get better jobs, NCS students need a more dedicated Chinese language curriculum that is recognisable by the general public. We need a “Chinese as a Second Language” policy.

Where civil service jobs are concerned, Chinese language proficiency requirements have been made tougher since the days leading up to 1997. The Government says this is crucial because of increasing Chinese language usage in both internal and external communications. It is unclear how much these requirements are really needed; although they vary according to seniority of the post, some Chinese requirements apply to all posts regardless of work nature and duties. The effect has been to greatly reduce the chances of ethnic minorities entering the civil service.

According to the RDO, indirect discrimination may occur when a job requirement posted has put a certain racial group at a disadvantage. By imposing a universal language requirement without taking into account specific circumstances for each job, the Government may indeed have committed indirect discrimination and violated the spirit of the RDO. The Government should abide by its own laws anyway. As Hong Kong’s largest employer, it should also set an example to the private sector in creating a more inclusive employment environment.

A growing “Chineseness” in our society after the handover has placed certain ethnic groups at a disadvantage. The increasing use of Chinese language in both the Government and the private sector has had the effect of barring ethnic minorities from education and job opportunities. It has also made it harder for them to access information and participate in political discussion. To create a fair and harmonious society, the

government needs to make it an inclusive one.

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