

Press Releases

LCQ16: Special learning needs of ethnic minority school children

Following is a question by the Hon Abraham Shek and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Michael Suen, in the Legislative Council today (December 14):

Question:

It has been reported that an ethnic Indian boy with an intelligence quotient of 120 to 129, which is close to the benchmark of 130 for prodigies, in accordance with a cognitive test he took using the "Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children", has been schooled at home for two years. His parents pointed out that they could not find a suitable school to satisfy his special learning needs, as several schools had refused their demand to admit the boy into a more advanced class. Moreover, the Education Bureau (EDB) has failed to find a proper school for the boy in two years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the number of gifted ethnic minority (EM) children who had been schooled at home in the past three years; and of the details and the reasons why they did not attend school;

(b) whether it knows which schools currently offer Chinese-language education to EM students, the number of EM students admitted to each of such schools in the past three years and the districts where the schools are located;

(c) given that several schools, as reported, have refused some parents' requests for admitting EM students, according to the authorities' assessment, whether this constituted indirect discrimination against EM students; if yes, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(d) of the reasons why EDB has failed for two years to arrange a school which suits the special learning needs of the aforesaid ethnic Indian boy, and whether any relevant party involved has to bear legal liability for the reported incident; if yes, of the details with any follow-up measure taken?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by Hon Shek is as follows:

(a) and (d) The Government's policy is to provide nine-year free and universal basic education for children aged between 6 and 15, irrespective of gender, ethnic origin as well as physical and mental ability. From the educational perspective, it is in the best interest of children to receive education in schools, which provide a more balanced and structured formal curriculum and extra-curricular activities as well as opportunities for interaction with peers and teachers. All these are essential for children's all-round development, covering the domains of ethics, intellect, physique, social skills and aesthetics. Gifted students are generally catered for through school-based gifted education programmes.

Regarding the specific case, the Education Bureau (EDB) has repeatedly endeavoured to arrange for the student concerned to enroll in schools appropriate to his age and abilities and which offer a broad and balanced curriculum to facilitate his all-round development. These schools include designated schools which support

non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students, schools which provide school-based gifted education programmes and schools which offer non-local curriculum. Since the requirements for admission and skipping level of the proposed schools differed from the aspirations of the student concerned and his parents, he finally declined all offers.

In response to the requests of the student concerned and his parents, the EDB has also made special arrangements to provide gifted education services for him. He has been taking the EDB Web-based Learning Courses since 2009, including Earth Science (with one-week intensive teaching in the summer programme), Mathematics and Astronomy. Since early 2011, he has also started to take the credit-bearing course "Boundless Adventures in Science" run by the Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education.

In handling non-attendance cases of students aged below 15, the EDB will first contact the parents concerned to identify the reasons for their child leaving schools and then provide the necessary support services. The EDB will continue to persuade the parents to let their child receive balanced and structured formal education in school. The EDB does not have any breakdown of non-attendance cases with regard to the category of gifted students.

(b) All public sector schools and Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools offering the local curriculum provide students, including NCS students, with opportunities to learn the Chinese language. The number of public sector and DSS schools admitting NCS students and the number of NCS students in the past three years are set out at the Annex.

(c) As regards the Race Discrimination Ordinance, the EDB has reminded all educational establishments of their responsibilities to endeavour to support the teaching and learning of all students irrespective of race, to create an accommodating environment for ethnic diversity in schools, to respect cultural and religious differences and to maintain communication with parents. Should there be cases, we will contact the schools concerned to understand the situation and take follow-up actions as appropriate.

Ends/Wednesday, December 14, 2011
Issued at HKT 12:51

NNNN