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Press release

Hong Kong Unison urges the Secretary for Education to clarify in his press conference certain issues about the “Chinese as a Second Language” policy

1. Hong Kong Unison maintains that education is a basic human right; the government has the obligation to have equal education opportunities. Chinese proficiency is the prerequisite for ethnic minorities to integrate into society and compete on a level playing field.
2. We welcome the change of mentality of the government and its acceptance that ethnic minority students need to learn Chinese as a second language and that the government should provide support and intervene early. This is the correct direction.
3. We have studied the Policy Address and the Policy Agenda. The language in the Policy Address is new and shows a new mentality, but the measures mentioned in the Policy Agenda do not depart much from the current policy and practice of the Education Bureau. We are worried that the Policy Address only decorates pre-existing measures and practice with grand language. This will only delay the solving of the problems in the education policy. It seems the Policy Address reflects the will of the most senior government officials rather than the genuine commitment and will of the Education Bureau.
4. As such, we have several important and fundamental questions for the Secretary for Education:
 - a. About point 1 under Improving Services for Ethnic Minorities, how will the Bureau devise the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” for each school? Will it invite the community and experts to participate in the devising of the framework? When will the framework be completed?
 - b. What is the difference between providing the “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework” and setting up a “Chinese as a Second Language” curriculum? Why has the government chosen the former?
 - c. About point 4 under Improving Services for Ethnic Minorities, does the Bureau have any plan to set up a “Chinese as a Second Language” from K1 to S6 to be adopted at mainstream schools? If yes, what are the details? Will the Bureau invite the community and experts to participate? Will the curriculum be drawn up and implemented in 2014/15?



- d. About point 4 under Improving Services for Ethnic Minorities, how will the Bureau assist schools in developing an effective mode of learning support? Also, how will the use of funding to schools be monitored to enhance accountability?
 - e. About point 7 under Improving Services for Ethnic Minorities, will the Bureau provide individualized support and progress review to students?
 - f. Are the various measures mentioned in the Policy Address supporting the learning of the Chinese language of ethnic minority students implemented in the presence or in the absence of a “Chinese as a Second Language” policy?
 - g. How are the various measures mentioned in the Policy Agenda fundamentally different from the measures already in place?
 - h. What concrete measures will the Bureau take to eliminate the de facto racial segregation in the public education system? What is the timeline? (Currently, in at least 8 public schools, ethnic minority students account for over 90% of the student population. This violates the Race Discrimination Ordinance.)
5. We maintain that only a comprehensive “Chinese as a Second Language” policy can enable ethnic minority students to learn Chinese well. A comprehensive policy would include:
- a. A “Chinese as a Second Language” teaching and learning centre, gathering actors including recognized experts and teachers who are committed to improving the education of ethnic minorities. The centre should develop the following based on evidence:
 - i. Quality and systematic “second language” curriculum and teaching materials;
 - ii. Stage learning objectives and assessment tools;
 - iii. Outcome indicators and review mechanism;
 - iv. Professional teacher training;
 - v. Professional support for schools; and
 - vi. Monitoring system about the use of resources.
 - b. The Education Bureau should set up a task force with independent members to implement the policy and monitor the use of resources with, inter alia, appropriate guidelines for schools and a reporting mechanism.
6. Hong Kong Unison hopes that the Education Bureau will respond to the above questions. Moreover, we will closely monitor the formulation and implementation of the policy. We do not rule out the possibility of urging the Equal Opportunities Commission to initiate a formal investigation or legal action. Hong Kong Unison also studies the possibility of and prepares for taking legal action.

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