

Relieved Ishaq a major star within a minority

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Ishaq Farrah Mohammad was sitting quietly in a classroom corner, looking anxious.

Her frown turned into an expression of happy surprise when her class teacher, Gordon Yu Kin-fu, handed the 14-year-old Pakistani girl her results.

She was, he announced, the school's best student, scoring three 5s and two 4s.

This is way out of my expectation, Ishaq said, expressing an ambition to be a children's dentist.

Although she's not sure she can fulfil her dream of getting into the University of Hong Kong, she won't need to repeat, which was what she was worried about.

Not all ethnic students do as well.

Fermi Wong, founder of minorities support group Unison, said only 1 per cent of non-Chinese-speaking students get into universities each year, while among local students the proportion is more than 20 per cent.

They can't really enjoy equal opportunities because their Chinese is not that good. They can't do some courses, even though they might have enough knowledge, she said.

Although they are allowed to take the easier Chinese-language test under the General Certificate of Secondary Education system, the score doesn't make them competitive.

The difficulty is that it is only equivalent to local primary two or three. This gives them less chance to get into local universities, **Wong** said.

If we want them to have equal opportunities, a Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum should be set up.

Class teacher Yu agreed.

Courses like liberal studies are especially difficult for them due to the lack of resources and information. Sometimes they have to rely on materials we translate for them.

According to the Joint University Programmes Admissions System, only one student from the school, the best among the 10 government-designated schools for ethnic minorities, got into a degree programme last year. The rest had to opt for vocational training programmes or associate degree programmes if they wanted to receive further education.

But only four out of 160 vocational programmes provided by the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education are in English, which limited the students' choices, **Wong** said.

Kavthi Duraisamy, an Indian student who graduated last year, was among the more persistent students. He spent a year at HKU Space Community College and will start at the university proper in September.

Others like Nadia Begum chose to do a part-time distance education degree from a UK university while working as a kindergarten assistant.

Tamura Miharu did a mainland degree. She graduated from Delia two years ago and then attended the Beijing Normal University in Zhuhai, which is trying to recruit ethnic-minority students and is promoting itself in schools like Delia with flyers declaring: Non-Chinese speaking students of Hong Kong can become university students.

The tuition is 24,000 yuan (HK\$30,000) a year and it takes four years to graduate.

But **Wong** doesn't recommend going to a mainland university because the degrees they provide are not recognised in Hong Kong, and she doubts that students with low Putonghua levels can do well there.

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Delia school's top student hopes to be among 1pc of non-Chinese-speaking pupils who get into university

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