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Chow pressure on *ethnic minority* schooling

EOC chief reiterates it may take government to task if policy address fails to right the wrongs

Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying has to iron out unfair education policies affecting *ethnic minority* and disabled pupils in his second policy address, or the government may face a formal investigation, the discrimination watchdog has warned.

The ultimatum came from Equal Opportunities Commission chairperson Dr York Chow Yat-ngok, who said the body could invoke its utmost power should Leung fail to tackle the issues in his January speech.

“In the case of *ethnic minority* and disabled education, the situation has been worsening,” Chow told the South China Morning Post. “Something must be done. We will wait until January, just to give the government some time to work on it. But if [these issues] are not addressed, we will definitely do something.”

He urged Leung to spell out ways he intended to get rid of “de facto” ethnically segregated schools, a situation that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had condemned as discrimination.

Help for schools could include providing resources and teacher training so they could assist the children to integrate culturally and in terms of language, and offering a second-language curriculum for Chinese, he said.

About 14,000 *ethnic minority* pupils are attending public schools this year. Twice that number of special-needs pupils were enrolled in mainstream schools in the last academic year.

Six months into his tenure, Chow said education issues were the immediate focus for the commission, which would consider a formal investigation into whether the government had breached anti-discrimination laws.

He said that when he met the Education Bureau on the issue, his words were “pretty much like those of Fermi Wong” Wai-fun, director of *ethnic minority* rights advocacy group Unison.

The group has complained of the bureau’s lack of response to its decade-old idea to teach Chinese as a second language.

Chow said he had also asked the civil service to hire more *ethnic* minorities. “Six per cent [of the city] is made up of *ethnic* minorities. So if within the government there is a similar percentage [of *ethnic* minorities], it won’t need to find as many translators.”

Unison research officer Yip Ho-ling said: “Technically, *ethnic-minority* parents could pick whatever public schools they want. But it’s whether there are enough provisions to keep them there – how we implement support – that is key. The [policy address] cannot just pay lip service.” The bureau said it would “continue to take into account stakeholders’ views including the [commission] to refine the support measures”.

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EDUCATION

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