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Language help for *minority* pupils

Chinese to be taught as a second language, with funds for teacher training and course materials

Schools will begin teaching Chinese as a second language for *ethnic minority* pupils from the start of the next academic year, the chief executive announced. Schools will be provided some HK\$200 million to support teaching *minority* children in the first year.

Teachers will be given professional training to implement the new curriculum, for which teaching materials and assessment tools will be developed.

Schools already admitting such children will receive a greater share of the funding.

Schools would adopt new methods – such as multi-age classes – in an effort to ease *ethnic minority* pupils into “mainstream Chinese-language classes”, Leung Chun-ying said.

An applied Chinese-language subject will also be introduced in phases for pupils at senior secondary level from September. Pupils studying the subject will earn a qualification which the government will ensure is recognised by employers and for the pursuit of further studies.

The aim is for *ethnic minority* children to eventually sit Chinese-language exams under the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education alongside their Chinese colleagues.

“*[Ethnic minority]* people] have difficulty integrating fully into the community ...,” Leung said. “Most South Asian *ethnic minority* residents call Hong Kong home ... they must improve their ability to understand, speak, read and write Chinese.”

Holing Yip Ho-ling, acting executive director of *ethnic minority* advocacy group Unison, said the organisation appreciated the move.

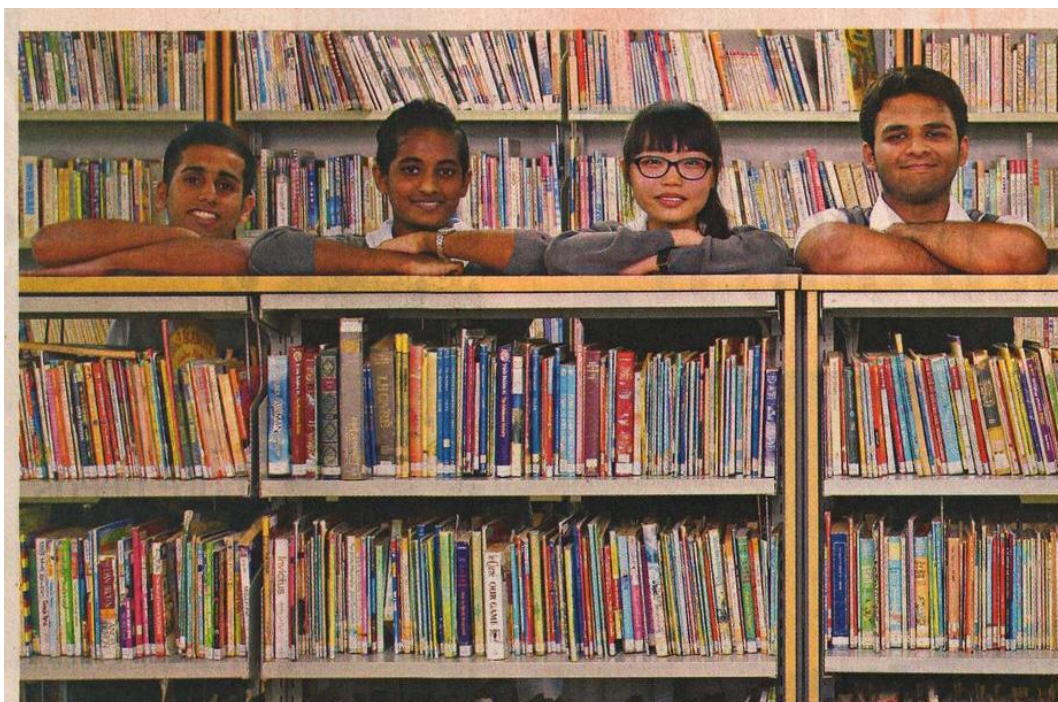
“The decision shows that the government is finally willing to accept that providing equal education opportunities for *ethnic* minorities is its responsibility,” Yip said.

Unison had said it would seek an Equal Opportunities Commission investigation and consider legal action unless the policy address spelled out measures to provide a curriculum that would enable *minority* pupils to become fluent in written and spoken Chinese. Commission chief York Chow Yat-ngok had also threatened an inquiry.

Joe Leung Cho-bun, professor of social work and social administration at the University of Hong Kong, said the initiative marked a shift in the government's attitude. He said it previously had encouraged a situation where rich non-Chinese speakers could ignore Chinese learning while their poorer counterparts were marginalised because of their weak Chinese.

There have been calls for a new curriculum for more than a decade. Professor Leung said the government may have realised that the *ethnic minority* community now wielded political power and could no longer be ignored.

“Apparently there needed to be a special policy for them,” he said. “This year it is most important for the government to collect as much support as possible.”



Pupils like these at the Delia Memorial School (Hip Wo) in Kwun Tong stand to benefit from the Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum. They will be able to earn an applied Chinese qualification which employers and post-secondary institutions will recognise. Photo: Paul Yeung

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