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‘Teaching Chinese starts with respect’

Ethnic minority pupils offer views on scheme to teach Chinese as a second language

A Chinese-as-a-second-language curriculum will work only when teachers learn to respect the unique identities of non-Chinese-speaking children, a group of ethnic minority pupils and parents has said.

At a meeting organised by ethnic minority advocacy group *Unison*, the 20 or so people were invited to join the discussions.

Suleman Siddiqui, a teenager studying in CMA Choi Cheung Kok Secondary School, said one of his teachers once told him he should not expect to be anything but a train driver or toilet cleaner when he grew up.

“Why are we always stereotyped? Why do they have such low expectations of us?” asked Suleman, a Pakistani whose family has lived in Hong Kong for four generations.

The government is targeting such pupils, who are often sidelined in local Chinese-speaking schools, with its “Chinese as a second language” subject.

The subject will be introduced in September and a HK\$200 million budget has been put aside to support it in its first year. Details such as sample lessons, assessment tools and learning materials have yet to be provided.

But Praleena Gurung, Suleman’s schoolmate, warned that if teachers did not change their methods, then it would be like throwing HK\$200 million “into a trash bin”.

The 14-year-old said her English-language teacher tackled global issues and explored different cultures with the class, while her Chinese-language teacher stuck to the textbook, which made lessons dry and boring.

“We’re afraid we’re going to learn in the same way with the same textbooks and the same teachers [when the new subject is implemented],” she said.

Reminding the meeting that Chinese was in fact their third language, the group said ethnic minority children were facing an identity crisis because their own cultures were not included in textbooks.

Former lawmaker and barrister Margaret Ng Ngoi-ye, who chairs the *Unison* board, said the lack of details about the new subject had led to anxiety among ethnic minority groups.

She said she was “thrilled” to see these children express their needs and concerns, and that she would deliver their opinions to the government.

University of Hong Kong law professor Puja Kapai said: “I think what the students are trying to tell us is that Chinese language is not the only part of this system that is broken. We need wholesale reform in education.”

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Amount, in HK dollars, set aside to support the new Chinese-as-a-second-language subject

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