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Do more for ethnic-minority pupils, NGO says

Government urged to end segregation and give better support to non-Chinese-speaking parents

Advocates of ethnic-minority rights have slammed the government for providing little support to non-Chinese-speaking parents when they select schools and minimal back-up for pupils in local Chinese schools who do not speak Cantonese.

A concern group, *Unison*, criticised the Education Bureau's explanation of de facto racial segregation in schools – that parents intentionally put their children into schools with mostly ethnic-minority pupils. It argued that a lack of information and choice pushed them to these schools.

A study by the NGO found that when parents considered schools, having good teachers ranked higher than a multiracial learning environment.

The survey, carried out between December and April, interviewed 99 ethnic-minority and 143 Chinese parents with children attending classes from K3 to Primary Three.

About 43 per cent of ethnic-minority parents were unhappy letting their children attend schools for ethnic minorities, where Chinese was not used as a medium of instruction.

“Many parents actually want children to get in touch with Chinese pupils and learn the language,” *Unison* research officer Holing Yip Ho-ling said.

However, it is difficult for non-Chinese-speaking parents to choose the school they genuinely prefer, because of a lack of information.

Yip said the English version of the Primary School Profile, published by the committee on home-school cooperation, carried less information than the Chinese version. Some schools had websites only in Chinese, stymieing the efforts of parents trying to find out more details.

The bureau said it would continue to hold “dedicated briefing sessions for non-Chinese-speaking parents” and “re-examine” websites to make more information available.

Even for ethnic-minority children who manage to secure a place in a local Chinese school, their early days are often difficult.

Filipino Danilo Reyes' nine-year-old daughter was the first ethnic-minority pupil at one local Chinese school. When she started school three years ago, she did not speak any Chinese and got no special support.

“She suffered from stress as there was no information on what do with [her problems]. The school did not want to deal with it,” Reyes, who had lived in the city for 10 years, said.

He had to hire tutors to help his daughter with her Chinese.

Unison urged the government to review the framework for pupils learning Chinese as a second language. The Legislative Council’s education panel will today discuss progress on improving language learning for non-Chinese-speaking pupils.

EDUCATION

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