

Teachers fear reforms spell end for French

The language is not on a list of subjects that will be on the curriculum in 2008

Carrie Chan

French teachers have demanded a meeting with the education chief over fears the subject will disappear from the secondary school curriculum after sweeping education reforms take effect in 2008.

The government says French can continue under the new system but has not made it clear how.

Under the proposed new curricu-

lum, students will take four core subjects – English, Chinese, mathematics and liberal studies – and two or three elective subjects from a list of 21. French is not on the list.

French Teachers' Association chairman Jean-Luc Rey said the association had demanded a meeting with Secretary for Education and Manpower Arthur Li Kwok-cheung. But they could only meet a senior official next month.

He said junior students moving to secondary level would give up French next year in the belief the subject would disappear in 2008.

"After the reform there won't be any public examinations for French. Students may be understandably reluctant to choose a subject not officially endorsed by the Education and Manpower Bureau," he said.

Mr Rey also claimed the bureau

planned to phase out subjects with an intake of less than 10 a year at a school – which would include French – but a bureau spokesman denied this.

Nearly 1,000 students are taking French in 10 schools. Four are aided schools while the others are directly subsidised. A total of 189 students sat Hong Kong Certificate of Education exams in the subject this year.

Christian Chasset, director of the Hong Kong Institute of Languages and a French educator for two decades, said he expressed similar concerns to Professor Li two weeks ago and was told schools now offering French classes would be able to continue.

But he said it was unclear whether the language would be added to the list of electives and whether students would be able to take public exams in French.

Mr Chasset was worried that secondary school students would

not have a chance to learn European culture through language.

He said: "We need to address this quickly because consultation [on the reforms] will end on January 19."

Education sector legislator Cheung Man-kwong said he had told Professor Li that French must be kept.

"Hong Kong is an international city and there are in fact students who do not know Chinese," he said. "Even if French is not available in public exams, there should be

some form of accreditation for students."

A spokesman for the Education and Manpower Bureau said French would be provided, but would not give details.

"[The bureau] fully recognises that languages other than Chinese and English, such as French, have been provided as part of the teaching and learning in HK for a long time. They will continue to be provided," the spokesman said.