

Developing HK's young people is the goal

In response to the articles on language learning in schools (*Education Post*, January 27), I would like to clarify the position on the study of languages in Hong Kong.

To maintain the competitiveness of Hong Kong as an international city and for our young people to fully participate in its rich culture, it is essential that education helps develop our students to be biliterate and trilingual in Chinese and English. This policy stance is well understood by schools and stakeholders.

We note, however, some gaps in the current provision of languages which are not desirable. First, some students in our local schools are not learning Chinese. Second, languages other than Chinese and English are spasmodically offered with variable certification.

Concerning Chinese language, we expect all publicly funded schools to provide students with opportunities to learn Chinese. However we recognise that for some schools with students whose mother tongue is not Chinese or who are returnees there will need to be adaptations to the curriculum and teaching.

The Chinese Language curriculum in Hong Kong sets clear learning targets and develops a learning outcomes framework with level descriptors. Schools can adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of their students. The Education and Manpower Bureau provides on-site support to help individual schools develop school-based Chinese curriculum for non-Chinese speakers. We will also develop a supplementary Chinese Language curriculum guide for these students.

We encourage non-Chinese speakers and returnees who have comparable Chinese proficiency to local students to take the Chinese Language paper in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination under the current system or Hong Kong Diploma of Education (HKDSE) after 2012.

For those who prefer to attain alternative qualification(s) in Chinese, in particular those who have a late start in the learning of Chinese or have not been given full opportunities to learn the local Chinese Language curriculum, the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) provides alternative exams such as the GCE and IGCSE. The GCSE Chinese exam will be available this year.

Schools will make the best arrangements for non-Chinese speakers and returnees to learn Chinese which may or may not include public assessment and certification.

Transitional arrangement is also allowed in the interest of students who have been studying a foreign language in lieu of Chinese. While we will be as flexible as possible, we would expect that starting from September 2007, all local Primary One students should study the Chinese Language curriculum recommended by the Curriculum Development Council, with or without school-based adaptations.

As for learning other languages, the New Senior Secondary attempts to expand opportunities for students to study other languages. For example, the HKEAA is exploring with Cambridge Assessments to offer examination for six languages, i.e. French, German, Hindi, Japanese, Spanish and Urdu to Hong Kong students. The results will be included in the HKDSE. Universities have also said they would continue to accept other languages, subject to any necessary modification, as an alternative to Chinese language under the "3+3+4" academic structure.

We have also earmarked resources, including the Diversity Learning Grant to promote diversification in curriculum. This supports our aim to tap into the abilities and interests of students and to expand the number of students taking other languages.

There is no question of marginalisation of other languages under the NSS curriculum. Students can take other languages as NSS elective subjects. Schools can make flexible time-tabling arrangement to accommodate their choices either within and/or outside the regular lesson time.

The highest learning standards possible of Chinese and English of our students will support the development of the society, culture and economy of Hong Kong. We also expect the study of other languages by more students to flourish as a result of the "3+3+4" reform and will work together with various stakeholders to achieve this goal.

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(Fev. 2007)