



ASSOCIATION FRANÇAIS LANGUE ETRANGERE HONG KONG
The Hong Kong Association of French Teachers
25/F., Tower 2, Admiralty Centre, 18 Harcourt Road, Central, Hong Kong
e-mail : info@afle.rectoverso.org

12-12-2007

Dear Dr. Kwan,

We are very disappointed by your refusal to meet us and the other stake-holders regarding the teaching and learning of French and other foreign languages in secondary schools after the implementation of NSS. If as you say, your line is very clear to you, this is not the case for everybody. Our colleagues teaching in secondary schools and their principals appear to be very confused by the often contradictory and incomplete information coming from EMB/EDB in the past few years. Basically, no one seems to know for sure what is going to happen and several schools have already stopped offering French as a subject altogether because of misunderstandings and uncertainties over the future. It also seems that EDB itself is quite confused over the various issues and sends conflicting information to the schools and the parents. A good example of the communication difficulties we encounter is that over the years, we still haven't figured out who is the coordinator/person in charge of French and other foreign languages in your department and everytime, we have to talk to a different person!

Regarding the future examination, we understand the reasons why EDB and HKEAA prefer the CIE AS level. However, we think that holding that examination in November is unacceptable. In short, it is unfair to our students and puts them at a disadvantage. I do not know how much experience you have in teaching and/or learning a foreign language, or whether you have consulted any expert in foreign language teaching/learning before deciding on the November date for the examination, but when ALL the teachers of a subject agree that the date is not suitable, I think you'd better listen to them. They all have many years of experience in teaching French to Hong Kong children at secondary level, they are in daily contact with the students, and as such, they know what they are talking about.

The only pedagogical argument you mention in favor of a November examination is that "language learning is continuous", implying that students will keep learning the foreign language during the summer holidays, and therefore don't need as much class time to get ready for their foreign language exam as they might for another subject. You seem to suggest that classroom teaching is not really necessary for foreign language learning and that students can learn as well outside the classroom as inside. This may well be true for people who are constantly exposed to the language (as is the case for mother tongue or to a lesser degree, second language learning). However, by definition, foreign language learners are NOT regularly exposed to the target language and tend to forget rather than progress during long periods of holidays. Besides, young learners need to be constantly motivated, encouraged, refocused, supported, corrected, etc. by their teacher. So compared with the current IGCSE exam and leaving out 2 months of

summer holidays, this leaves our students with only 5 more months to prepare for an examination that, according to CIE, requires 10 months of teaching/learning. In short, our students will have 50% less time to prepare for that examination than they normally should.

Bearing this in mind, we would like you to reconsider the November date and explore other solutions. Here are a few suggestions:

- Have you asked CIE whether it would be possible for them to return examination results of the June session in time for inclusion in the HKDSE? Could CIE make special arrangements to mark HK papers in priority and return them before your deadline?
- Would CIE consider organizing an examination in April or May for Hong Kong?
- Have you contacted the other examination providers (AQA and Edexcel) to check when they hold their examination and whether their schedule is more appropriate for our students?

The recent tone in your letters tends to indicate that this item is no longer open to review. Furthermore, some statements seem to indicate that either French teachers accept the proposal “or else”. We hope that in fact you are in favor of these initiatives and can demonstrate it through more consultation with those who know what they are doing, who are at the coal face and understand both the positive and negative impacts of those decision which come from above. We also hope that Hong Kong will soon finally join the ranks of educators world-wide in offering curricula that allow diversity in learning opportunities for students and allow minorities within the community to have equal opportunities.

Yours truly,

Jean-Luc Rey
chairman