

Chinese for minorities taxes schools

Beatrice Siu

The government should dish out more resources if it is serious about implementing Chinese as a second language for ethnic minority children, a senior schoolteacher says.

The vice principal of Hong Kong Taoist Association The Yuen Yuen Institute No 3 Secondary School, Leo Cheung Chik-wing, said that while the government has increased subsidies to schools admitting ethnic children from HK\$300,000 to HK\$600,000 and issued a supplementary guide to the Chinese curriculum, this is far from enough.

The Taoist Association school started admitting ethnic minorities students

three years ago and now has 84 students from Secondary One to Three.

About 10 teachers are responsible for developing the teaching materials and teaching.



Leo Cheung

Cheung said the school has designed its own materials and has streamed students into three levels, from learning basic vocabulary to reading articles, as well as arranging extra tutorial

classes for students.

He hopes that within the next few years about five to six of these ethnic students will be able to take the Chinese

exam in the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education.

"Although the Education Bureau has issued a supplementary framework on the Chinese language, it is not clear enough. We are not sure if the teaching materials will fit the bureau's requirements," Cheung said.

Chinese-language teacher Wong Kin-ho said both teachers and students have to adapt to cultural differences. "On one occasion, we tried to stamp a cartoon piggy on a student's workbook to praise him, but he suddenly knelt down, prayed and apologized. We realized the pig is forbidden in his religion," Wong said.

Tak Ching Girls' Secondary School

is also facing a tough time even though it started admitting ethnic minorities students four years ago.

Since the bureau expanded the subsidy last year, the school was able to hire a Chinese-language supervisor in the summer.

Vice principal Wong Yee-tin said the school tried to group the students with similar ability in one class, but it was not effective. It is now using textbooks from a local publisher and has arranged after-class tutorials for students.

"Some parents have asked us to also teach them using English but we cannot do this as we are a Chinese-medium school," Wong said.

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'Speaking the language is hard . . . writing even worse'

Ethnic minorities are finding it difficult to learn Chinese.

While many are able to grasp simple Cantonese words and phrases, they find it difficult to write Chinese.

Hong Kong-born Kainaat Asif, who is of Pakistani origin, said she seldom got the opportunity to speak the language with her friends, and only started learning Chinese when studying at the Hong Kong Taoist Association The Yuen Yuen Institute No 3 Secondary School in Tseung Kwan O.

"I had difficulty in reading, particularly Chinese phrases and classical Chinese. I was saddened when I failed in both written and oral Chinese and I looked down on myself," Asif said, adding the greatest difficulty was finding the right tone.

"Once, when I was with friends, I tried to tell them I was

surfing the internet but because of my awkward Cantonese pronunciation I said I was surfing obscene websites. They teased me and I felt pretty upset."

Written Chinese was even more of a headache.

Asif said she now seizes every chance to talk to her schoolmates in Cantonese as her ambition is to become a lawyer.

Haris Muhammad is also studying at the same school.

"Chinese characters are difficult to write because there are so many strokes," he said, adding that Cantonese slang has various meanings.

"For example, a friend said to me that someone had *wan yuen*. I had always thought it meant game over, but they told me it means someone died," he said.

Muhammad said he will pay



more attention to details in daily life and learn as much Chinese as he can. He hopes to join the disciplined services as a police officer or ambulance-man. "One day they will need foreigners to communicate with workers without a translator," he said.

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Writing Chinese is a big headache for Kainaat Asif, center, and Haris Muhammad, who are pictured with fellow student Nayab Feroz.
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