

Motion 2

The government should implement LGBTQ education in primary and secondary schools to eliminate discrimination by children against sexual minorities

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Motion 2:

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Introduction

According to Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as a State Party to the Convention, Hong Kong has the duty to ensure children are protected against all forms of discrimination. The Government of Hong Kong should also ensure that children's rights are protected and should take appropriate measures to further children's rights.

Educational topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity, specifically LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) have remained a taboo area for both parents and schools because of religious or social reasons. If children lack knowledge about LGBTQ, they are more likely to exclude or even discriminate against LGBTQ persons, inflicting grave psychological damage upon the latter. Therefore, our group hopes that topics related to sexual orientation and gender identity will be included in Primary and Secondary education, so that students gain a thorough and in-depth understanding about the topic and become capable of making decisions on their own. No matter what their views are, students should respect and refrain from discriminating against LGBTQ persons. For this reason, our group has decided to move the motion in the current Children's Council.

To understand the views of various stakeholders regarding the topic, our group has designed three sets of questionnaires to collect the opinions of primary school students, secondary school students and members of the public. We have received completed questionnaires from 65 primary school students, 562 secondary school students, and 106 members of the public.

Present Situation

1. Discrimination against LGBTQ Children

According to the research report on LGBTQ secondary students conducted by the Hong Kong Institute of Education this May, LGBTQ students suffer various levels of stress or discrimination at school, which include physical and verbal violence, weak interpersonal relations, damage to or loss of personal property, and online bullying. According to LGBTQ students, they were often on the receiving end of discriminatory and disparaging comments initiated by other individuals (including students, teachers or school personnel). LGBTQ students also frequently suffer physical and sexual harassment, thus indicating that on the personal relations front, LGBTQ children are often the object of boycotts.

Such discrimination causes great harm to LGBTQ children, making them uneasy and damaging their self-confidence. As a result they tend to hide how they feel and their sexual orientation, sometimes even reject and hate themselves. LGBTQ children are prone to mood disorders, self-mutilation and drug abuse, and their psychological health tends to suffer. LGBTQ children are also more likely to be rejected by peers at school, which leads indirectly to loss of learning opportunities, thus depriving them of their rights to education and development.

2. Absence of Proper Education and an Atmosphere of Open Discussion

Currently, LGBTQ education has yet to be incorporated into the official curriculum. Even though the Education Bureau's amended sex education curriculum guidelines of 1997 include topics on sexual orientation, schools still choose to avoid the topic, such that students cannot acquire the multilateral view required to make proper judgements, thus breeding discrimination.

On the family side, parents tend to avoid topics of sexual orientation as they are raised in traditional Chinese family values and having offspring is one of the most important elements of "filial piety". LGBTQ persons are widely viewed as incapable of having children, thus in violation of the core values of filial piety – a great sin in the eyes of parents.

3. Information Overflow in the Media

The Internet is a treasure trove of information, and admittedly diversified views are useful to stimulating thought processes and enriching students' knowledge of LGBTQ. However, the raw information may contain radical views and if students lack a basic understanding of LGBTQ, they may not be able to separate the wheat from the chaff. Some individuals in society hold discriminatory views against LGBTQ people and, under such negative influence or peer pressure, students may take on similarly hateful views which may translate into discriminatory action against LGBTQ persons. The crux of the issue remains that young people are lacking in proper knowledge about LGBTQ persons and are easily influenced by the overflow of information in the media. Proper LGBTQ education can effectively promote knowledge about the LGBTQ community and equality among all.

4. Religious Background of Schools

A great many primary and secondary schools are founded by organisations of religious background. According to the Educational Bureau's overview of secondary and primary schools in Hong Kong, over half of these schools are from a Christian and Catholic background. Religious organisations often have their own views about sexual minorities, either finding them objectionable or avoiding the issue entirely. The religious background of the school, the founding organisation, and even the responses of the parents factor into teachers' considerations about whether to touch upon such topics, often resulting in LGBTQ becoming a taboo at these schools and students being ignorant about sexual minorities. 70% of secondary school students responding to our questionnaire noticed a total information vacuum about LGBTQ at their schools. Being misinformed or under-informed, students may easily take on discriminatory and even hostile attitudes against their sexual minority peers. Teachers' avoidance may further aggravate the situation as these sexual minority students would have nowhere to turn to for help.

Suggestions

1. Optimize the Existing Advisory Group on Eliminating Discrimination against Sexual Minorities

Under the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau the Government has set up an Advisory Group to tackle the issue of discrimination against sexual minorities, but the group has failed to address children's needs. As children are at the stage of psychological development and professional guidance is necessary, by founding a LGBTQ Child Rights Concern Group the society can more effectively protect the psychological health of LGBTQ children. Education is the key, and as such we suggest the government to add a LGBTQ Child Rights branch to the existing Advisory Group on Eliminating Discrimination against Sexual Minorities.

We believe that LGBTQ individuals and children (student ambassadors in suggestion 3) can be invited to join the group and offer their insights. The Group will also be responsible for work related to education about sexual orientation and gender identity (suggestion 2) and teacher training (suggestion 4).

2. Implement Education about Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Primary and Secondary Schools

According to the results of the questionnaire survey, as many as 78% of secondary school students and 70% of the members of public support the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity education in primary and secondary schools.

Our group believes that such forms of education should be conducted in the form of a non-standard curriculum, avoiding inculcation of any particular stance. The focus should be on respect and non-discrimination of LGBTQ individuals. Our group believes that such education should be mandatorily implemented in four phases: junior primary, senior primary, junior secondary and senior secondary, across all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

At the junior primary phase, students should obtain a basic knowledge of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, so that they understand everyone is born equal, that under no circumstance should anyone discriminate against another individual, and that we should respect others. Teachers should also strongly condemn discriminatory actions and make it clear that they are unacceptable.

At the senior primary phase, students should acquire basic understanding about LGBTQ persons and understand that they are a part of the society. Teachers should also point out that despite their differences, LGBTQ persons enjoy human rights and should not suffer discrimination of any form.

At the junior secondary phase, students should learn about different social views regarding the LGBTQ issue, and gain a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding about LGBTQ. Through participating in the activities arranged by organisations holding different views, they should better understand their own sexual orientation such that those harbouring doubts about their own sexual orientation can seek timely help.

At the senior secondary phase, teachers should guide students to discuss relevant issues freely and impose no limits on the choice of topic. If reasons are sound and stand up to scrutiny, teachers should respect whatever position students choose to take; however, teachers should also make sure LGBTQ individuals are not discriminated against.

3. Student Ambassador Programme

Our group suggests that LGBTQ Peer Education should be implemented by means of a Student Ambassador Programme. Each school can choose or encourage students to become student ambassadors who will represent their school in promoting sexual orientation and gender identity education. Student ambassadors will receive training to enrich their knowledge about human rights and LGBTQ, with promotion to take the form of activities plus education initiatives for parents. Members of the student ambassador programme will also participate in the Advisory Group on Eliminating Discrimination against Sexual Minorities (LGBTQ Child

Rights Concern Group) and attend discussions on behalf of students so that the Group can benefit from children's input.

4. Pre-career and On-the-job Training for Teachers

Teachers play a vital role in implementing LGBTQ education. In the education process, teachers shape students' views about LGBTQ persons through conveyance of proper knowledge about LGBTQ. Our group suggests that teachers should receive pre-career and on-the-job training so that they are well-equipped with knowledge and concepts about sexual minorities and human rights, and that they are reminded of the need to respect different views and positions.

Our group believes that courses on sexual orientation and gender identity education should be included in the curriculum of the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) as well as regular on-the-job training of teachers. Aspiring teachers should complete relevant HKIEd courses before they graduate, while on-the-job teachers should complete training courses of a designated number of hours. Such courses help teachers to understand the goals of and acquire basic knowledge about LGBTQ education. The goals are not about changing teachers' views of LGBTQ but helping them to understand the sensitivity of the issue, and that respect is the key no matter what one's stance is. They should understand that it is natural to have a personal view about things, but should point out clearly to students that such views are of a personal nature – then follow with further elaboration to help students learn about and discuss LGBTQ-related issues.

Conclusion

Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses the importance of “[t]he State's recognition that education should be directed at developing the child's personality and talents, preparing the child for active life as an adult, fostering respect for basic human rights and developing respect for the child's own and national values and those of others.” Sexual minorities should not suffer unnecessary and unreasonable discrimination because of their sexual orientation. As our society upholds the anti-discrimination banner, the issue of discrimination against sexual minorities has often been neglected. Discrimination cannot be resolved overnight, and we believe that it is only by fostering the fundamental moral principle of “don't discriminate” in all children that society can effectively alleviate, even eliminate the problem of discrimination.

Education is a key component of child growth. By offering sexual orientation and gender identity education through official channels, students may learn about LGBTQ properly so that they are not misled by coloured or biased information in the media. We hope that by starting with educating the children we can reduce discrimination against sexual minorities and promote public knowledge about LGBTQ persons. We hope that in the future the public of Hong Kong will become more accepting toward persons of different sexual orientations, and in so doing create a more harmonious and inclusive society.

We move that the motion that the government should implement LGBTQ education in primary and secondary schools to eliminate discrimination by children against sexual minorities be passed.

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