

The Government should amend “The Operation of the Whole-day Schools” guidelines and enforce their implementation at primary schools

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Motion 2: The Government should amend “The Operation of the Whole-day Schools” guidelines and enforce their implementation at primary schools

Introduction

Education is at the core of social development, and primary education plays an indispensable role in basic education. Hong Kong society sets great store by the learning ability and whole-person development of school students; as such, since 1993, the Education Bureau has been committed to progressively introducing whole-day primary schooling to replace half-day primary schooling, as a means to facilitate the diversified development of children.

Originally, the purpose of the policy of whole-day primary schooling was to provide teaching in the morning, so that in the afternoon, students could finish as much homework as possible under the guidance of the teachers and participate in extra-curricular activities, enjoying a diversified social experience with abundant rest. Although most of the local primary schools have adopted whole-day primary schooling, most of them have used all the sessions as regular classes, thus deviating from the original purpose and causing problems.

Therefore, our group will specifically present the recent situation of primary schools adopting whole-day schooling and offer relevant suggestions for improvement. On behalf of my group, I move that the government should amend “The Operation of the Whole-day Schools” guidelines and enforce their implementation at primary schools so that the current issues will be addressed and the situation improved.

Current Situations

1. Overlong class periods, little time for rest

It is stated in the guidelines for whole-day schooling instituted by the Education Bureau (hereafter “the Guidelines”) that students should be spending about 7 hours at school, with recesses and lunchtime totalling 100 minutes (lunchtime should take 60 minutes, and recesses should take 40 minutes). However, some schools have lengthened class periods and reduced rest time so as to boost learning progress. *Ming Pao* mentioned in the *Primary School Profiles 2015* (hereafter “*Profiles*”) that 64 primary schools provide students with only 30 minutes or less for their lunchtime. Dr. Wilson Fung, specialist in Paediatrics, mentioned that students whose facial muscles are still developing need more time to chew, and thus 25 minutes for lunchtime is clearly not enough. Some students eat less to catch up with activities during lunchtime. Their physical health has thus been compromised by such rushed lunchtimes.

For class periods, the *Profiles* also mentioned that only 20% of the schools have provided tutorial sessions, while the rest have used all sessions as regular classes. Thus, *Ming Pao* concluded that 70% of the primary schools did not abide by the Education Bureau's instructions on class periods. The American Psychological Association mentioned that although much content could be injected in a short period of time under the quantitative model of teaching, students lack the time to understand and digest the knowledge. This not only strangles students' interest in learning, but also reduces their learning effectiveness. In addition, it lowers the opportunity for diversified development. When the learning content is homogenized, there will be no room for diversified development.

2. Heavy workload

According to an earlier study by the Hong Kong Parents League for Education Renovation (hereafter "The League"), a half of the parents interviewed point out that children's tutorial sessions are only supplementary contents to their courses. Therefore, over a half of the students interviewed have to spend 1-2 hours to finish their homework, nearly 20% of the students need 3 or more hours, and only a few students do not need to do homework at home. The original purpose of the whole-day schooling policy was that students could finish their homework at school so as to leave time to have fun, develop interests at home, and enjoy family life. However, given the heavy workload, the reality is the precise opposite of what was intended.

As for working hours spent on homework, the whole-day schooling policy introduced by the Education Bureau originally intended to offer an opportunity for students to finish their homework with guidance from teachers. However, there is no such time for primary school students under the current situation. According to the report of The League, more than 80% of primary school students need to spend more than 1 hour to finish their homework at home, which reflects the common situation of doing homework at home. Even if they encountered problems, they were not able to turn to their teachers. Furthermore, students spend a lot of time on homework at home, which results in less time for entertainment, rest and family life. Students are deprived of their right for development, and this is contrary to the Education Bureau's philosophy of "Teaching and learning happily" and "Whole-person Development".

3. Heavier burden on teachers

The current whole-day schooling policy also increases the burden on teachers. An increase in course contents has caused teachers to spend more time on preparation and extended their working hours. According to the survey "Teachers' opinion on whole-day schooling policy in primary schools" (referred to hereafter as "The Survey") of the

Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers, the teachers interviewed work for 64.5 hours a week on average. Nearly 80% of teachers suffer from gastrointestinal problems due to insufficient lunchtime. Ninety-five per cent of teachers agree that the whole-day schooling policy increases their workload and most of them demand administrative support. It is clear that a lack of support from the Education Bureau to schools has augmented the administrative workload for teachers. If stress becomes unbearable to teachers, who are on the front line of education, how do we provide students with a healthy learning environment?

Recommendations

1. Change the purposes of class hours – adjust the conventional courses

With regard to class hours, the teaching objective of multi-faceted development should take precedence. The government should stipulate that primary schools should use two in every eight sessions for three kinds of purposes outside the regular courses. The government should also supervise such adjustments.

Firstly, the tutorial sessions of primary schools should be supervised. The government should build up a mechanism to inspect the contents of tutorial sessions. Primary schools should also proactively adjust class arrangements so that students are able to finish part of their homework at school with guidance from teachers to relieve their workload. Meanwhile, teachers could provide advice and supervision according to the students' progress.

Secondly, a programme of practical study should be implemented. In this programme, students could apply the knowledge learnt from lessons to real life. For example, through inventing a garbage cleanup robot, knowledge from Mathematics and General Studies could be put into practice. Students would be free to choose study topics depending on personal interests and observations. They could easily turn their learning interest into motivation so as to gain new knowledge outside of class such as mechanical engineering and social issues. This could enhance their creativity, sensitivity to current affairs and problem-solving skills, as well as broaden their horizons and nurture multiple intelligences outside of class.

Thirdly, physical and aesthetic development should be encouraged. Schools should provide several physical and aesthetic activities in the curriculum for students to participate in voluntarily. Students could strengthen their physical health through exercise or nurture their cultural literacy through arts. These could help them cultivate at least one lifelong skill.

As mentioned previously, most primary schools only focus on written knowledge and neglect the students' learning interest and creative intellect. The three recommendations here will change the academic-based education model and truly enhance students' diversified development.

2. Monitor students' break time at school

The government should monitor how schools implement the Guidelines in order to guarantee that students enjoy at least 100 minutes of break time at school, including recesses and lunchtime. The government should collect timetables from all schools to check whether they can put the Guidelines into practice, and send staff to inspect classes, recesses and lunchtimes regularly to check whether students have enough time for rest. The government should also make good use of the school monitoring and reporting mechanism through which students and parents can file complaints to the authority about rest shorter than the stipulated requirement of 100 minutes. Any school found not to be following the Guidelines should be put on record, while follow-up actions such as cutting teaching resources should be taken.

3. Review and regulate regular courses

The government should conduct new reviews and adjustments of the class hour ratio for regular courses. The local syllabus is lengthier than foreign ones. According to a comprehensive study by Stanford News, the education system of Finland advocates happy learning and goes to great lengths to simplify the primary education curriculum, abandoning the quantitative-based education model. Under these measures, the reading ability and learning drive of Finnish students rank top globally, which shows that the length of curriculum does not necessarily affect the students' learning ability. In view of this, the government can follow Finland's reduction in regular courses to vacate more time for other diversified activities such as cookery and scientific experiments. Chu Tsz Wing, principal of Baptist Rainbow Primary School, says that in a diverse and pleasant learning environment, students not only perform just as well as anyone else, but also show increased learning effectiveness.

4. Set a maximum amount of homework

The government should set a limit on the quantity of homework in the Guidelines. Teachers of different subjects should coordinate the daily amount of homework so as to guarantee students enough time for rest and play. According to Eiffel Chau, chairman of the Hong Kong Parents League For Education Renovation, setting the maximum amount of homework can ensure that students have spare time for diverse development. According to our survey, most of the students who spend around an hour to finish their homework think that there is no pressure from homework; on the contrary, those who spend over an hour to finish their homework are emotionally affected by the

heavy workload. Therefore, the Government should place a limit on the quantity of homework and set the time for completion of homework to a maximum of one hour so that students do not have to do their homework at home and have sufficient time for rest, entertainment and their families.

5. Introduction of Model Schools Scheme

With regard to schools, the Government could carry out the Model Schools Scheme. A model school must pass audit checks and gain approvals by the government to prove that it provides adequate opportunities for diversified learning, and a proper amount of homework. The government could regularly publish a list of model schools for public reference. Schools wishing to improve their teaching quality could refer to the model schools and adjust their teaching methods accordingly. The government could also invite the model schools to hold seminars to share their successful implementation of whole-day schooling with their peers, thus gradually encouraging more schools to adopt the philosophy of whole-day schooling.

Conclusion

Whole-day schooling has become more and more popular. The original purpose of the Education Bureau in implementing the policy was to provide students with diversified development and healthy growth by combining the regular curriculum, tutorials and extra-curricular activities. However, as academic performance is the top priority in today's society, many schools have run counter to the original purpose of whole-day schooling by misusing the extra time to catch up with teaching. The heavy workload leaves students at a loss to know how to cope, while spoonfeeding students also deters them from learning. We believe that by urging the government to revise and enforce the implementation of the "The Operation of Whole-day Schools" guidelines, it will be a more effective means to ensure that students build up their abilities and enjoy happy learning.

The principle of education is not merely about passing old knowledge to students, but more importantly, it is to empower students to explore the surrounding environment to discover their own potential. Not only is this the original purpose of whole-day schooling, but also the vision of our group and indeed of Hong Kong students generally.

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