

Action group wants school lessons all in Chinese

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The Education Action Group yesterday urged the Government to adopt Chinese as the medium of instruction in all Anglo-Chinese primary and secondary schools to enable students to learn more.

An official of the group, Mr B. J. Neagle, said in a statement that the present system of using English as the medium of instruction in Anglo-Chinese secondary schools was unrealistic and unsatisfactory.

"The disadvantages of this system are numerous and obvious," Mr Neagle said.

"It inevitably weakens the students' use of, proficiency in and knowledge of Chinese, while the teaching of English in many schools is completely inadequate."

Mr Neagle pointed out that many teachers themselves could not master English, let alone teach good English to students.

"Teachers themselves are uncertain of their own knowledge of English, especially the nuances of pronunciation and sentence structure.

"As with any other subject, if the teacher is unsure of his ground, his natural tendency is to retreat to formal, dull, text-book teaching with no innovations and few imaginative lessons.

"Questions and class discussions are therefore minimised."

Mr Neagle pointed out that 80 per cent of Hongkong secondary school students attended Anglo-Chinese schools and received instruction in English. But 90 per cent of them previously had Chinese as their medium of instruction in primary schools.

Students who fail to understand lectures given in English by their teachers normally resort to their text-books - but then find the English text too difficult for them to understand, he said.

"Memorisation is, therefore, the answer. An examination is often not a test of knowledge but a test of memory," said Mr Neagle.

Many teachers agree with the group's suggestion and say they find the present system inadequate.

Mr Chan Cheung-lap, an Anglo-Chinese secondary school teacher, admitted that many teachers had insufficient command of the English language to enable them to use it in their lessons.

He, and many of his colleagues, felt that both students and teachers would benefit if Chinese was used as the medium of instruction.

"Most students cannot fully understand text-books in English. They waste a considerable amount of time in consulting dictionaries," said Mr Chan.

Another teacher, Mr Wong Wing-sun, said lower form students could not even understand simple English spoken by teachers.

"There is no reason why teachers and students should use a language neither have mastered when they could easily express themselves fully in Chinese," he said.

The Education Action Group urged the Government to use Chinese as the medium of instruction in all primary and secondary schools, while using both Chinese and English in matriculation classes and universities.

The group also suggested there should be special "improvement" courses for teachers who teach English.

Mr Neagle stressed that all text-books should be in Chinese.

"They must be written by local people who are specialists in their fields. English text-books could easily be translated into Chinese.

"The books, when printed in Chinese, would also be cheaper," Mr Neagle said.