

## **Frequently Asked Questions and Answers on Playing and Singing of the National Anthem at Schools**

**Q1 :**       **The Education Bureau (EDB) issued a circular to schools on 18 June 2020 specifying that schools must display the national flag and the regional flag as well as play and sing the national anthem when holding celebration activities for the New Year’s Day (1 January), the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Establishment Day (1 July) and the National Day (1 October). What are the reasons?**

**A1 :**       To cultivate students’ sense of national identity is one of the key learning goals of primary and secondary education. Enabling students to understand the development of their own country in different aspects, such as history, culture, economy, technology and political systems and laws, as well as cultivating in them a national sentiment, are the educational obligation of schools. Holding flag raising ceremony as well as playing and singing the national anthem at schools help promote national education and enhance students’ sense of national identity. New Year’s Day (1 January) is the beginning of a year; and as Hong Kong is a part of China, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Establishment Day (1 July) and the National Day (1 October) are important days that worth celebrating. Therefore, if schools hold celebration activities for the abovementioned days, they must display the national flag and the regional flag as well as play and sing the national anthem. In addition, schools are also strongly advised to display the national flag and the regional flag as well as to play and sing the national anthem on other important days and special occasions, such as school anniversary events and graduation ceremonies; and schools are encouraged to display the national flag and the regional flag, and / or play and sing the national anthem regularly. Teachers and students should stand solemnly and deport themselves with dignity while the national flag and the regional flag are being raised, and observe the relevant etiquette while the national anthem is being played and sung to show their respect for the country; and demonstrate their good quality as nationals. For non-Chinese school staff and students, observing the etiquette while the national flag is being raised, and the national anthem is being played and sung, is a way of showing respect for the country where they are located.

**Q2 : New Year's Day (1 January), the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Establishment Day (1 July) and the National Day (1 October) are all general holidays. Is it a must for schools to hold flag raising ceremony as well as play and sing the national anthem on the aforementioned days?**

A2 : All along, many schools have been accustomed to displaying the national flag and the regional flag as well as playing and singing the national anthem on important days and special occasions. As New Year's Day, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Establishment Day and the National Day are general holidays, schools should consider if they can hold celebration activities, which include flag raising ceremony together with the playing and singing of the national anthem, on the aforementioned days, or hold celebration activities on the school days immediately before or after the aforementioned days having regard to their own circumstances. Teaching students about the national flag and the national anthem of their own country is an important part of Moral, Civic and National Education. Schools should take every possible opportunity to celebrate the aforementioned important days for the country and Hong Kong as a Special Administrative Region, including holding flag raising ceremony as well as playing and singing the national anthem at schools to enhance students' sense of national identity and teach students the related etiquette to show respect for the country and raise the national consciousness of teachers and students.

**Q3 : Are international schools in Hong Kong also required to play and sing the national anthem on important days and special occasions?**

A3 : Through a circular, EDB requires primary and secondary schools (including special schools) to display the national flag and the regional flag as well as play and sing the national anthem when holding celebration activities in relation to the specified important days (such as New Year's Day, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Establishment Day and the National Day) to cultivate students' sense of national identity. The aforementioned requirement is also applicable to international schools. Students of international schools anywhere of the world should understand the local culture and history as well as respect the national anthem as the symbol of the country where they are located. There are local students in most of the international schools in Hong Kong. If these schools hold celebration activities in relation to the above-mentioned days, they are also required to play and sing the national anthem. Meanwhile, schools can also consider playing and singing the national anthem during other cultural / community / educational activities to enhance local students' sense of national identity and deepen expatriate students' understanding of Chinese culture.

**Q4 : What is the definition of “playing and singing” in the National Anthem Ordinance?**

A4 : To ensure that the public have a clear understanding of the meaning of “playing and singing the national anthem” in the National Anthem Ordinance, section 2(3) of the National Anthem Ordinance (except section 5 of the National Anthem Ordinance) has provided interpretations of “playing and singing the national anthem” which include (a) singing the national anthem; (b) playing the national anthem on musical instruments; and (c) playing a recording of the national anthem. Please refer to section 2(3) of the National Anthem Ordinance for the content.

**Q5 : Regarding the occasions on which the school plays and sings the national anthem, what are the requirements on the score and the recording to be played?**

A5 : The National Anthem Ordinance has clear specifications on the score and recording of the national anthem to be played. Regarding the occasions on which the school plays and sings the national anthem, the official recording provided on the website of the HKSAR Government should be played or the national anthem should be played on musical instruments in accordance with the standard score provided on the website of the HKSAR Government for the singing of the national anthem. Regarding the standard score and official recording for the playing and singing of the national anthem, please refer to the website of the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB): CMAB Homepage ([www.cmab.gov.hk](http://www.cmab.gov.hk)) > Topical issues > National Anthem

**Q6 : Is there any penalty under section 9 of the National Anthem Ordinance (The Secretary for Education must give directions for the inclusion of the national anthem in primary education and in secondary education)? If schools do not comply with the directions given by the Secretary for Education, what will the EDB do?**

A6 : Section 9 of the National Anthem Ordinance provides that the Secretary for Education must give directions for the inclusion of the national anthem in primary education and secondary education to enable the students to learn to sing the national anthem; and to educate the students on the history and spirit of the national anthem; and on the etiquette for playing and singing the national anthem. There is no penalty clause stated therein. All along, the EDB has been issuing instructions and guidelines to schools whenever necessary. In general, schools operate in accordance with the requirements as set out in the Education Ordinance, relevant legislation and guidelines issued by the EDB. If schools do not comply with the instructions issued by the EDB, the EDB will request schools to make improvements in accordance with the prevailing mechanism.

**Q7 : If teachers fail to follow or violate the instructions of the Secretary for Education, what will the EDB do?**

A7 : Teachers play a vital role in passing on knowledge and nurturing students' character and are important role models for students. It is therefore of utmost importance that their words and deeds must adhere to the standards of professional conduct and morality generally accepted by the community. Whether it is the national anthem, the national flag or the national emblem, it is the sign and symbol of a country, and paying due respect by any of the citizens is a must. If the behaviour of individual teachers violates expected professional conduct, schools should stop it immediately. Schools should communicate with the teachers concerned to understand the reasons behind and assess the seriousness of their behaviour as well as the negative impact on students. Schools should handle the violation in a prudent manner in accordance with the relevant school-based procedures and mechanism, and take appropriate follow-up action with reference to the relevant provisions under the Code for the Education Profession of Hong Kong and the Codes of Aid. If the case is serious and involves unlawful behaviour, for example, such as a teacher deliberately insults the national anthem in front of the students, affecting the school operation and the others, and the school cannot handle the situation, the school may consider seeking assistance from the police. In addition, according to the School Administration Guide, schools should report all suspected serious offence/ misconduct cases to the EDB. The EDB, being responsible for work regarding teacher registration, handles all cases relating to teachers' professional misconduct and violation of the law in a serious and prudent manner, including taking action against the teacher concerned based on the gravity of the substantiated cases, such as cancellation of teacher registration, or issuing a reprimand, warning or advisory letter.

**Q8 : If individual students show disrespect for the national anthem, how should schools follow up?**

A8 : Schools should handle the behavioural problems of students at school under the objective of education. Schools have the responsibility to teach students the etiquette for playing and

singing the national anthem, such as standing solemnly and acting with dignity, and enhance students' sense of patriotism. If there are students with behavioural problems, schools should handle their misbehaviour of showing disrespect to the national anthem in a sensible, reasonable and lawful manner in accordance with the school-based situation and prevailing strategies for guidance and discipline. These include understanding the reasons for the students' misbehaviour and providing suitable counselling and follow-up in view of their explanations and specific circumstances to allow students to make improvement. If the case is serious and involves unlawful behaviour which affects the school operation and the others, and the school cannot handle the situation, the school may consider seeking assistance from the police.

**Q9 : What should schools do if students behave inappropriately and cause disruption to the ceremony when the national anthem is played and sung?**

A9 : During the flag raising ceremony when the national anthem is played and sung, participants should stand solemnly and deport themselves with dignity, and should not behave in a way disrespectful to the national anthem. Schools should follow up immediately if students behave inappropriately and cause disruption to the ceremony, including requesting the concerned students to stop such behaviour at once. If necessary, schools may first remove the concerned students from the venue to allow the activities to continue in a solemn manner.

After the ceremony, teachers should reiterate to all students the meaning behind the flag raising ceremony and the playing and singing of the national anthem as well as the proper attitude they should have, and to enable them to understand the importance of respecting the national anthem; and that their disruptive behaviour was really improper. In addition, schools should find out the reasons behind the misbehaviour of the concerned students and provide them with suitable counselling and follow-up support in consideration of their explanations and concrete situation, including educating students on the proper attitude and behaviour of taking part in flag raising ceremonies, and playing and singing of the national anthem.

**Q10 :** Will the following situations constitute violation of the law?

- **Students (including expatriate students / non-Chinese speaking students) being unable to sing or recite the national anthem correctly; or**
- **Students at special schools having some uncontrollable actions when singing the national anthem.**

A10 : Schools should enable students to learn to sing the national anthem through educational activities, as well as educate them on the history and spirit of the national anthem and the etiquette of playing and singing the national anthem, which includes standing solemnly, acting with dignity and not behaving in a disrespectful way or affecting others when singing the national anthem.

Schools should encourage students to actively participate in the related activities as well as explain to them that the spirit of the National Anthem Ordinance is for students to respect the national anthem, and public and intentional behavior with intent to insult the national anthem should be prohibited. Therefore, students have nothing to worry about if they show respect for the national anthem and do not act intentionally to insult the national anthem. Regarding students who are less proficient in Chinese, the important thing is to make an effort to learn the national anthem and demonstrate a respectful attitude towards the national anthem.

**Q11 :** **Parents may attend some of the school activities, such as sports days and graduation ceremonies, during which the flag raising ceremony is held and the national anthem is played and sung. What should schools do if parents do not conform with the proceeding of the ceremony, for example, not standing solemnly and singing the national anthem?**

A11 : If there will be flag raising ceremony and playing and singing of the national anthem, schools can brief parents about the

relevant procedures before the activities start and remind them about the proper etiquette during the ceremony. If it is found that some parents do not follow exactly the arrangements during the ceremony, schools can remind individual parents politely. Schools should maintain good communication with parents through day-to-day contact to enable them to understand the meaning of holding the flag raising ceremony and playing as well as singing the national anthem during individual activities, promote home-school co-operation and enhance students' sense of national identity through concerted efforts.

**Q12 : When parents request schools to exempt their children from singing the national anthem at school, how should schools handle it?**

A12 : Schools should inform parents clearly that schools will let students learn to sing the national anthem through education activities, as well as educate them on the history and spirit of the national anthem and the etiquette of playing and singing the national anthem. Schools also need to explain to parents that playing and singing the national anthem is an ordinary learning activity at schools and students should participate in it under normal circumstances. Schools are obliged to educate students the etiquette of playing and singing the national anthem, such as standing solemnly and acting with dignity but not playing and singing the national anthem in a way that undermines its dignity. If the behaviour of students shows deviation, schools should handle the case in a reasonable and lawful manner in accordance with the school-based situation.

**Q13 : It is a common practice for schools to teach the national anthem. Why is there a need for the EDB to introduce the *Supplement to the Music Curriculum Guide*? How should the teaching of the national anthem be implemented and arranged in other subjects / curriculum areas?**



A13 : There is international consensus that it is the responsibility of school education to cultivate in students a sense of national identity as well as teaching them to know and respect the national anthem. The learning contents of the national anthem have long been incorporated in the curricula of different subjects, such as General Studies for primary schools, Music, Chinese History, as well as in Moral, Civic and National Education, providing students with many opportunities to sing the national anthem inside and outside the classroom. In this connection, the Education Bureau (EDB) has all along been providing curriculum resources on the national anthem.

The Supplement focuses on the learning and teaching of the national anthem, complementing the *Music Curriculum Guide* of 2003. The Supplement is developed building on existing foundations as well as current implementation situation in schools, and having taken into consideration the views and suggestions from different stakeholders. The Supplement provides concrete learning and teaching emphases for further supporting the learning and teaching of the national anthem in schools.

For other subjects / curriculum areas, schools need only to introduce, where appropriate, the history and spirit of the national anthem as well as etiquettes to be observed when playing and singing the national anthem when teaching relevant topics or conducting relevant learning activities in the existing curriculum.

**Q14 : Are non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students required to learn the national anthem? How do schools address the learning needs of NCS students regarding the national anthem?**

A14 : The basic principle in teaching the national anthem is to instill in students respect for the national anthem. As school contexts vary, each school could exercise its own professional judgment in matters regarding the learning and teaching of the national anthem to suit its own context and the learning needs and abilities of its students, so long as the basic principle of respect is adhered to. Students should also make an effort to learn the national anthem. Schools should fully understand

that some non-Chinese speaking students who are less proficient in Chinese might not be able to reach the same standard as that of the Chinese-speaking students. As different schools have different needs, the EDB will provide timely support to cater for their needs, including enriching existing online resources and organising teacher professional development programmes, to help schools take forward the related work.

**Q15 : Do students in international schools need to learn the national anthem? Have the EDB consulted international schools? Will there be any supporting measures for them?**

A15 : Under the National Anthem Ordinance, the interpretation of primary education and secondary education is applicable to primary and secondary schools, including international schools.

The EDB has had discussions with international schools. They showed understanding that students of international schools anywhere of the world should understand the local culture and history as well as respect the national anthem as the symbol of the country where they are located. Therefore, we do not see the need to restrict to whom the national anthem should be taught according to the students' nationalities, the programmes they are taking and the types of school they are enrolling. In addition, there is a considerable number of local students studying in international schools.

We understand that international schools have their own school situations. Hence, while upholding the principle of educating students to respect the national anthem of the country where they are located, there may be school-based approaches in implementation. The EDB has also prepared the English version of materials on the learning and teaching of the national anthem. If international schools consider necessary in future, the EDB will provide them with reference materials.

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