

## Rethink Korean school subsidies, government tells prefectures

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In a move that could further strain relations with North Korea, the central government has ordered prefectural governments to rethink their subsidies to Korean schools affiliated with a pro-Pyongyang residents group.

At a news conference on March 29, education minister Hiroshi Hase said that the written instruction aims to remind prefectural governments of points to keep in mind in granting subsidies to schools affiliated with the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon).

While Hase emphasized that the directive “does not aim to make prefectural governments slash or terminate subsidies,” he said that the ministry will keep track of how the prefectural governments respond to the instruction.

The education ministry issued the instruction to 28 prefectural governments across Japan to re-evaluate the public benefits and effectiveness of subsidies to 68 Korean elementary, junior and senior high schools, six of which are temporarily closed due to the declining number of students.

The directive, signed by Hase, also said that the schools’ curriculum and personnel matters are “under influence of Chongryon, which has a close relationship with North Korea.”

The rare move came after the ruling Liberal Democratic Party asked the ministry to instruct prefectural governments to suspend subsidies to Korean schools from June last year as part of sanctions against Pyongyang’s abduction of Japanese nationals and its recent nuclear tests.

Muneyuki Shindo, a professor emeritus of public administration studies at Chiba University, criticized the ministry’s move because the instruction could serve as a de facto order for prefectural governments to terminate subsidies to Korean schools.

“The prefectural governments will be put under strong pressure because they will fear that the ministry may cut other subsidies depending on how they respond to the instruction,” Shindo said.

“Korean ethnic schools do not function as venues to spread pro-North Korean ideology, and the government must treat them separately from their diplomatic policy toward North Korea.”

(This article was written by Yukihiro Takahama and Kenji Katayama.)

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Korean residents in Japan and their supporters rally in front of the Nagoya city office to protest Mayor Takashi Kawamura’s plan to reduce subsidies to Korean schools on March 9. (Asahi Shimbun file photo)