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**PRIYANTHA AND OTHERS**

**Vs.**

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND OTHERS**

COURT OF APPEAL  
SAMAYAWARDHENA, J.  
CA/WRIT/157/2016

**Writ of certiorari—Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act, No. 5 of 1960, sections 5, 6— Assisted schools—Unaided Schools—Education Ordinance, No. 31 of 1939— Education Regulations 1951— National Education Commission Act, No. 19 of 1991, section 2— National Education Policy—Circulars of the Ministry of Education—International schools—Importance of English medium education**

The petitioners who are parents of several students of Ashoka College of Horana (a government approved private unaided school) filed this application seeking to quash by way of a writ of certiorari the decision of the secretary to the Ministry of Education that the medium of education of the school should be either the mother tongue (Sinhala/Tamil) or bilingual in terms of the education policy of the government.

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This decision was based on section 6 of the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act, No. 5 of 1960.

It is the position of the petitioners that the government policy in respect of the medium of instruction is contained in the Education Ordinance, No. 31 of 1939, and the Education Regulations 1951 made thereunder, and according to these, there is no prohibition for a government approved private unaided school to conduct classes in the English medium.

The position of the secretary to the Ministry of Education is that although no national education policy has been declared in terms of section 2(1) of the National Education Commission Act, the education policy of the Government is reflected in the circulars issued from time to time by the Ministry of Education and, according to these circulars, a private unaided school such as Ashoka College cannot conduct classes purely in the English Medium.

**Held:**

1. Section 6 of the Act does not apply to all unaided schools. It applies only to assisted schools which later became unaided “by virtue of an election made under section 5”. This school has been, from the beginning, a government approved private unaided (English medium) school. Hence section 6 has no applicability. The decision challenged cannot sustain.

**Held further:**

2. It is regrettable that the National Education Policy of the Government is to be understood on assumptions when the Parliament passed a law in 1991 to establish a National Education Commission inter alia to recommend and advise the President to declare a National Education Policy. Circulars issued by the Ministry of Education are unhelpful to clearly understand the National Education Policy.

3. International Schools have been operating in a vacuum with no regulation, management or control by the Ministry of Education.

Per Samayawardhena J.

“Competence in English is essential for success in today’s globalised world. English should not be the language of the urban elite to downgrade otherwise talented rural youth. In my view, it

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is hypocrisy to make it compulsory for underprivileged children to study in the Sinhala or Tamil medium, while making it possible for children of the elite and affluent to study in English medium at International Schools or overseas, maybe to maintain a gap.”

APPLICATION for a Writ of Certiorari.

Mahanama De Silva for the Petitioners.

Hashini Opatha, S. C., for the 1st Respondent.

*cur. adv. vult.*

June 10, 2019

**SAMAYAWARDHENA, J.**

The Petitioners who are parents of several students of Ashoka College, Horana filed this application seeking to quash by way of a writ of certiorari the decision contained in P12 and to prohibit by way of a writ of prohibition implementation of the said decision. If a writ of certiorari is issued, a writ of prohibition is redundant.

By P12, the 1st Respondent, Secretary to the Ministry of Education, informed the Manager of the school to teach either in the mother tongue (Sinhala/Tamil) or in the bilingual medium, in terms of the Education Policy of the Government, or face the consequences.

Ashoka College, Horana is, admittedly, a Government Approved Private Unaided School.

The decision in P12 is purportedly based on section 6 of the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act, No. 5 of 1960. This Act, as seen from section 2, makes provisions applicable to Assisted Schools.

Section 6(1) of the said Act, so far as relevant to this application, states:

*The proprietor of any school which, by virtue of an election made under section 5, is an unaided school-(a) shall educate and train the pupils in such school in accordance with the general educational policy of the Government [and] (g) shall comply with the provisions of any written law applicable to such school and matters relating to education.*

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Section 6, in my view, does not apply to all Unaided Schools. It applies only to Assisted Schools which later became Unaided “by virtue of an election made under section 5”.

Section 5 allows a proprietor of any Assisted School, by serving a written notice on the Director of Education, to elect to administer that school as an Unaided School.

The school under consideration-Ashoka College, Horana-is not an Assisted School which became an Unaided School by virtue of election under section 5 of the Act. It has been, from the beginning, a Government Approved Private Unaided (English medium) School.

The predecessor to Ashoka College is Marshall Preparatory School, which, according to the Petitioners, was founded in the late 1880s by a European lady by the name of Ms. Marshall. Since then, this Private School has been conducting classes in the English medium.

Hence the decision contained in P12 is based on a wrong premise and therefore bad in law. Section 6 of the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act, No. 5 of 1960 has no application to Ashoka College, Horana.

I quash P12 by certiorari. Issuance of a writ of prohibition prohibiting implementation of the decision contained in P12 is superfluous. However I formally issue a writ of prohibition as well.

Copious submissions were made about the Education Policy of the Government, as section 6 of the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act enjoins the proprietor of any Assisted School, which, by virtue of an election made under section 5, became an Unaided School, to educate and train pupils in such schools in accordance with the General Education Policy of the Government.

As section 6 of the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act is inapplicable to Ashoka College, Horana, although it is not necessary for the present purposes to consider the General Education Policy of the Government, let me add the following for completeness.

It is the position of learned Counsel for the Petitioners that the Government Policy in respect of the medium of instruction is contained in the Education Ordinance, No. 31 of 1939 and the Education Regulations 1951 made thereunder marked X1, and according to these there is no prohibition for a

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school such as Ashoka College, a Government Approved Private Unaided School, to conduct classes from Grade 1 to 12 in the English Medium.

Learned Counsel further submits that section 2 of the National Education Commission Act, No. 19 of 1991, provides for His Excellency the President to declare a National Education Policy, but no such declaration has been made up to date, and the Education Policy of the Government shall therefore be understood from the Education Ordinance and the Education Regulations of 1951 made thereunder.

Learned State Counsel, appearing for the Secretary to the Ministry of Education, admits that no declaration of a National Education Policy has been made, but states that the Education Policy of the Government can be culled, if not assumed, from the documents tendered to Court, and, according to these documents, a Private Unaided School such as Ashoka College cannot conduct classes purely in the English medium.

It is regrettable that the National Education Policy of the Government is to be understood on assumptions in bits and pieces from documents scattered everywhere, when the Parliament passed a law 28 years ago in 1991 to establish a National Education Commission inter alia to recommend and advise His Excellency the President on declaring a National Education Policy.

Section 2(1) of the National Education Commission Act, No. 19 of 1991, reads as follows:

*The President, subject to the provisions of the Constitution, may, declare from time to time the National Education Policy which shall be conformed to by all authorities and institutions responsible for education in all its aspects.*

Section 2(3) of the Act reads as follows:

*The National Education Policy shall be formulated on a consideration of the recommendations and advice made to the President by the National Education Commission established by section 3.*

It is distressing to note that we do not have a National Education Policy, which should be a top priority. Circulars are issued by the Ministry of Education from time to time giving various directives to the authorities concerned, in my view, without a clear vision. By looking at the circulars of the Ministry marked P7A-P7C, it is heartening to note that since recently

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the Ministry has understood the importance of changing the medium of instruction to English.

Competence in English is essential for success in today's globalised world. English should not be the language of the urban elite to downgrade otherwise talented rural youth. In my view, it is hypocrisy to make it compulsory for underprivileged children to study in the Sinhala or Tamil medium while making it possible for children of the elite and affluent to study in English medium at International Schools or overseas, maybe to maintain a gap.

I might also add that International Schools have been operating in a vacuum with no regulation, management or control by the Ministry of Education. These schools are registered under the Companies Act or as Board of Investment projects.

It is apt to quote the concluding remarks of Professor Rajiva Wijesinha, who in 2001 served as a Consultant to the Ministry of Education to initiate the reintroduction of English medium education in the state sector, at a seminar on the subject of "Promoting English Medium Education", marked X with the counter affidavit.

English is no longer just the language of the British, a legacy we could do without. Rather it is the principal international language, one of increasing opportunities all over the world. The comparative advantage we had with regard to English has been sacrificed at the altar of a divisive linguistic nationalism, which I fear has contributed to our nation being deprived of a tool that could have helped us immeasurable. While the privileged continued to benefit from their possession of this tool, the vast majority of our people, of all communities, had no access to it. We owe it to them and to the nation as a whole to take all possible steps, in the interests of equity as well as national prosperity, to set right this sad situation.

The application of the Petitioners is allowed. The 1st Respondent, the Secretary to the Ministry of Education, shall pay each of the four Petitioners a sum of Rs. 100, 000/= as costs of the action.

The Registrar is directed to send copies of this Judgment to the Secretary to the Ministry of Education and the Chairman of the National Education Commission.

*Application allowed.*

*Judgment by: Mahinda Samayawardhena, J.*

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