

CHAPTER 12

ELECTIONEERING ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED IN SCHOOLS OR PARTICIPATED BY SCHOOL PUPILS

PART I : GENERAL

12.1 Candidates, school supervisors, principals and teachers are requested to take note of these guidelines when considering allowing the conduct of electioneering activities in schools or seeking the assistance of pupils in electioneering activities.

12.2 Involvement of school pupils in electioneering activities has always been a matter of public concern. Anybody in authority must **not** use his/her position to exert undue influence on youngsters of school age under his/her charge to recruit them for electioneering activities. If the EAC comes to know that a person has abused his/her position by involving youngsters of school age under his/her charge in electioneering activities, it may make a reprimand or censure against the person. For use of force or duress on a person's voting preference, see s 13 of the ECICO. *[Amended in September 2007]*

12.3 Candidates who are in authority (e.g. school principals) should not distribute their EAs to the parents of pre-primary, primary or secondary school pupils through these pupils to avoid any impression of undue influence on youngsters of school age under the charge of these persons in authority in the school. *[Added in September 2019]*

PART II : SCHOOL PUPILS

12.4 While it is for the promotion of civic education that school pupils are encouraged to take an interest in community affairs, including elections, it is considered undesirable to involve them in electioneering activities at too young an age. Unattended young children may cause control problems and, particularly where in large numbers or in overcrowded situations, may create a danger to themselves and others. Therefore, pre-primary or primary school pupils should not take part in electioneering activities. *[Amended in September 2012]*

12.5 Distribution of EAs is a form of electioneering activity. School supervisors, principals or teachers may be supporters of a particular candidate in a constituency. While they are free to support any candidate they prefer, they should not distribute or help in the distribution of EAs of any candidate to the parents of pre-primary, primary or secondary school pupils through these pupils. Moreover, they should not ask pupils to request their parents to vote for any particular candidate. The guideline above also applies to candidates who are themselves school supervisors, principals or teachers. This guideline is based on the same principle stated in para. 12.2 above, and could avoid any impression of undue influence on young children under the charge of these persons in authority in the school.

12.6 The EAC adopts the advisory circular issued by the Secretary for Education to all schools for general guidance, emphasising the following points:

- (a) participation by pupils in electioneering activities must be **entirely voluntary**;
- (b) the **written consent** of a parent or guardian must be obtained beforehand;

- (c) in no circumstances should pre-primary or primary school pupils be asked to take part in such activities;
- (d) there should be no disruption of the pupils' education, and in no circumstances should normal lessons be interrupted to enable pupils to take part in such activities; and
- (e) in no circumstances should pupils be asked to take part in activities in areas where they may be subject to various elements of danger, including those of traffic.

12.7 Pupils who take part in canvassing activities should pay attention to their own school regulations, and in particular those regarding the wearing of school uniform in such activities.

12.8 The EAC recognises that school pupils who are 18 years of age or above are by law responsible for their own acts and making election-related decisions for themselves.

PART III : ELECTIONEERING ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

12.9 During the election period, school supervisors, principals or teachers may invite or be approached by candidates to give talks on topical issues to students in their schools. Regardless whether the topic to be covered by such a talk involves an election, the presence of a candidate delivering the talk and copies of the speech which may be circulated to students and brought home to their parents may have the effect of promoting or advertising that candidate. Such activities should, therefore, be regarded as the relevant candidate's electioneering activities. (See also para. 12.5 above)

12.10 In line with the **fair and equal treatment** principle, the EAC appeals to all school supervisors, principals and teachers to provide equal opportunity to all candidates of the same constituency for the purpose of electioneering. If a school authority has decided to allow a particular candidate to conduct electioneering activities in the school, other candidates of the same constituency should be given the opportunity to do the same, so that no unfair advantage will be accorded to or obtained by any candidate over others regarding election campaigning. *[Amended in September 2019]*

PART IV : SANCTION

12.11 If the EAC comes to know that any candidate or school or person is in breach of the guidelines in this chapter, it may make a **reprimand** or **censure** in a public statement which will include the name of the candidate, the school or person concerned, and may also refer the case to the Education Bureau. Candidates should therefore apprise the school or person concerned who offers them assistance of these guidelines. *[Amended in August 2008]*