

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

SURVEY ON KINDERGARTEN ADMISSION POLICIES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS NON-CHINESE APPLICANTS

Executive Summary

Ensuring equal opportunities in education for ethnic minorities (EM) is one of the strategic priority areas for the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). Fair admissions has been a matter of concern, particularly in kindergartens following reports by parents and other stakeholders of admission policies and practices that unfairly place EM parents at a disadvantage.

Two years since a HK Unison study¹ reported that non-Chinese parents faced a lot of difficulties in finding local curriculum kindergartens for their children, the EOC undertook a similar telephone survey in October 2017 by making admission enquiries with 179 local curriculum kindergartens which have joined the newly implemented Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme. The calls were made by non-Chinese speakers, comprising EOC's staff and an EM parent volunteer, to best simulate the real experience. In addition, a review of the accessibility of kindergartens' webpage information for EM parents was conducted in November 2017. The objective of these two exercises was to gauge the improvement, if any, in the fairness and openness in kindergarten admission practices and policies towards EM (particularly South Asian) applicants by assessing:

- Openness to admitting South Asian students
- Information provision to South Asian parents
- The extent of Chinese language proficiency as a hurdle for South Asian applicants

Key Findings:

1. When enquired about the kindergartens' acceptance of applications from non-Chinese speaking (NCS) children, around one in four (26.3%) gave rejecting, discouraging or highly ambiguous responses.
2. While 72.6% of the kindergartens surveyed said they conduct admission interviews in Cantonese, a significant proportion (73.1%) of them agreed to change the language of interview to English upon further request. This is an improvement from the 45% found in the HK Unison survey of 2015.
3. One-fifth or 20.5% of the surveyed kindergartens take Chinese language proficiency as a selection criterion, with only a small proportion of them willing to replace it with other criteria.

¹ Hong Kong Unison Limited; Research on Kindergarten Support and Attitude towards Ethnic Minority Students in Hong Kong; May 2015

4. Over 30% of the surveyed kindergartens currently having NCS students said they do not provide support for Chinese language learning. Most of the others did not have a clear answer about the formal support structure or measures to help NCS students with language in school.
5. Over 70% of the webpages of the surveyed kindergartens were either mostly or completely in Chinese.

Recommendations:

1. The Education Bureau (EDB) is recommended to strengthen its monitoring and guidance of kindergartens towards ensuring that the admission process is free of any unjustifiable language requirements and that NCS applicants are provided language assistance.
2. Kindergartens are advised to develop non-discriminatory policies to handle admission enquiries and applications from NCS applicants, using the EOC's Easy Guide on Promoting Racial Equality in Schools: Kindergarten Admission as reference; and ensure that all staff understand and follow the policies.
3. In view that some kindergarten staff and administrators may not be aware of the implications of language requirements under the Race Discrimination Ordinance, it is recommended that EDB arrange to provide further training in this area with the assistance of EOC and other NGOs.
4. The EDB is recommended to enhance its funding mechanism for supporting NCS students to cover those kindergartens admitting less than eight NCS students so as to encourage more kindergartens to start accepting NCS students. Besides, additional guidance and resources should be deployed for kindergartens to provide more information in English on their websites and publications.
5. Kindergartens are encouraged to come up with a formal structure of language support for NCS students in school that makes the best use of the additional funding as well as support available through programmes such as the University-School Support Programme. It is also recommended that these support measures be put up on the school website for the information of NCS parents.
6. The provision of cultural sensitivity training is highly recommended for kindergarten staff as NCS parents can be easily turned away by some insensitive responses from kindergartens as seen in the survey, e.g. stressing that the kindergarten is a Chinese school instead of asking whether the parent wants his/her child to study in Chinese; informing NCS parents that interviews are conducted in Chinese when in fact interviews in English can be arranged when requested for, etc.