



平等機會委員會
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION

KINDERGARTEN ADMISSION POLICIES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS NON-CHINESE APPLICANTS



14 March 2018

Report on Telephone Survey &
Webpage Review of Kindergartens

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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.

平等機會委員會

幼稚園對非華語申請人的收生政策和態度之調查

研究摘要

平等機會委員會(平機會)視確保少數族裔的平等教育機會為策略性優先工作之一，十分關注學校對非華語學生的收生情況，特別是在幼稚園方面，平機會一直收到不少家長及其他持份者的反映，指個別幼稚園的收生措施對少數族裔申請人構成不公。

據香港融樂會兩年前公布的一項調查²，非華語家長為子女找尋本地課程幼稚園時遇上不少困難。有見及此，因應教育局於本學年推行「免費優質幼稚園教育計劃」，平機會於 2017 年 10 月向參與此計劃的本地課程幼稚園再進行一次類似的電話調查，共 179 間幼稚園受訪。是次調查由平機會非華裔職員及一名少數族裔義工以家長身份用英語致電查詢收生資料，務求更貼近實際處境。調查人員亦於 2017 年 11 月查閱幼稚園的網頁，了解少數族裔家長是否可藉此取得應有入學申請資料。調查的目的是量度幼稚園在收生措施及政策和對少數族裔(特別是南亞裔)的公平與開放程度上於過去兩年有否改善，重點包括：

- 錄取南亞裔學生的開放程度
- 向南亞裔家長提供的資料
- 中文水平對南亞裔申請人構成妨礙的程度

主要調查結果：

1. 當問及幼稚園是否接受非華語兒童入學申請時，四間幼稚園中便有一間(26.3%)作出拒絕、勸退申請人或給予極之含糊的答覆。
2. 72.6%受訪的幼稚園表示會以廣東話進行入學面試，但當中不少(73.1%)可因應進一步要求而同意改用英語進行面試，較 2015 年香港融樂會調查時只有 45%幼稚園答應作此安排有進步。
3. 20.5%受訪幼稚園以中文程度作為篩選準則，當中只有少數願意因應非華語兒童的限制以其他準則取代。

²香港融樂會：香港幼稚園對少數族裔學生的支援和態度研究調查報告；2015。

4. 現時已錄取非華語學生的受訪幼稚園中，超過 30% 表示沒有為學生學習中文提供支援。其餘大多數幼稚園對協助非華語學生學習中文的正規支援措施所作出的回應都欠缺詳盡。
5. 超過 70% 受訪幼稚園的網頁全部及大部份只提供中文資料，非華語家長未能從中取得學校資料供選校之用。

建議：

1. 建議教育局加強對幼稚園的監察和指引，以確保幼稚園的收生過程沒有任何缺乏理據的語言要求，非華語申請人亦可在過程中獲得應有的語言協助。
2. 建議幼稚園參考平機會的《種族平等校園簡易指南—幼稚園收生》制定不含歧視的政策來處理非華語申請人的入學查詢和申請，並確保所有職員認識和依循有關政策。
3. 鑑於一些幼稚園職員和行政人員未必知道缺乏理據的語言要求可能觸犯《種族歧視條例》，建議教育局與平機會及其他非政府機構合作，為幼稚園提供這方面的進一步培訓課程。
4. 建議教育局改善撥款機制，把非華語學生的支援擴大到錄取少於 8 名非華語學生的幼稚園，以鼓勵更多幼稚園開始錄取少數族裔學生。此外，應為幼稚園調撥更多資源和提供額外指引，使幼稚園以英文在其網頁和刊物提供充分資料。
5. 鼓勵幼稚園為非華語學生制定校內的正規語文支援措施，例如透過大學—學校支援計劃等，善用額外撥款和既有支援；並建議把這些支援措施的詳情上載於學校網頁上，讓非華語家長知悉有關資料。
6. 大力建議為幼稚園職員提供文化敏感度培訓，以免非華語家長因欠缺敏感度的學校職員回應而放棄查詢或申請。例如：徵詢家長是否希望子女在中文環境中學習，而非重覆強調幼稚園是以中文授課；校方若可改以英文進行面試，建議職員及早提供選擇，否則一般少數族裔家長在最初得悉以廣東話面試後，未必懂得作進一步要求。

Kindergarten Admission Policies and Attitudes towards Non-Chinese Applicants

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The Race Discrimination Ordinance (RDO) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race in several areas, with education being one of them. The RDO makes it unlawful for a school to discriminate against a person on the ground of race in the terms of admission and by refusing to accept an application, among other things. Indirect discrimination under the RDO may also result if schools use language, in this case Chinese language, without justification as a means to evaluate applicants, which may unfairly impact non-Chinese applicants more than others.
- 1.2** The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC), which is responsible for implementing the anti-discrimination ordinances, including the RDO, in Hong Kong, has been working on the issue of education for ethnic minorities (EMs) as one of its strategic priority areas. Fair admissions has been a matter of concern, particularly in kindergartens, following reports by parents and other stakeholders of admission policies and practices that work to the disadvantage of EM parents.
- 1.3** This was supported by a study conducted by the Hong Kong Unison in 2015 (the “Unison survey”), which reported that non-Chinese parents faced a lot of difficulties in finding local curriculum kindergartens for their children. It was found that some kindergartens simply refused to give application forms to EM applicants; some conducted interviews in Cantonese without allowing parents to arrange friends to interpret or providing any interpretation support; some staff were unhelpful with enquiries and directed the parents to other schools with high concentration of EM students, etc.

1.4 Unfair admission practices as well as barriers to EM parents' access to information places EM children at a distinct disadvantage by affecting their choice of kindergartens. This has the larger potential impact of preventing EM children from integrating into the mainstream society by blocking access to an integrated school environment. Finally, this could obstruct their upward mobility and future prospects by limiting their opportunities to learn Chinese. EM children would have a much better chance of learning Chinese properly in an immersed Chinese environment that starts at the pre-school stage.

2. SURVEY OBJECTIVES

2.1 Since 2015, some policy initiatives and measures have been implemented to encourage and support kindergartens to admit EM children. One of the key initiatives is the introduction of the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme (the “Scheme”) by the Education Bureau (EDB) beginning in the 2017-18 school year, which includes the provision of additional funding³ for kindergartens admitting eight or more non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students to help support their Chinese language learning in school. In addition, apart from reminders of non-discriminatory admission policies in the EDB’s Kindergarten Admission Guide, the EOC also developed and distributed an “Easy Guide on Promoting Racial Equality in Schools: Kindergarten Admission” to all kindergartens in September 2017, underlining the principles and suggesting appropriate practices of fair admissions.

2.2 Following up on the 2015 Unison survey and taking into account the above-mentioned recent developments, this survey aimed to examine if there have been improvements in policies, practices and attitudes of kindergartens. In particular, the purpose of this survey was to gauge, independently and in comparison with findings from two years earlier, the fairness and openness in kindergarten admission practices and policies for 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

³ According to the EDB Circular No. 7/2016: Free Quality Kindergarten Education, Appendix 10, paragraph 3, a grant comparable to the salary of one kindergarten teacher will be provided for kindergartens admitting eight or more NCS students.

3. SAMPLING & METHODOLOGY

- 3.1** Since only kindergartens under the local curriculum are eligible for the Scheme, the target of the survey was confined to this group of kindergartens. From a total of 1,014 kindergartens in Hong Kong in the 2016-17 school year, 874 are adopting the local curriculum. 743 local curriculum kindergartens have joined the Scheme since its introduction⁴ in the 2017-18 school year.
- 3.2** To ensure relevancy of data, kindergartens were sampled from those districts having a South Asian population of over 2,000⁵. Eleven out of 18 districts meet this criterion and there are totally 463 targeted kindergartens in these districts. In the sampling, a proportional representation rule was followed. The number of kindergartens included in the sample from each district and geographical region was kept more or less proportionate to the percentage of South Asians in that district and geographical region.
- 3.3** Twenty local curriculum kindergartens were chosen in districts with over 4,000 South Asian population, 15 in those with 3,000-3,999 population, and 12 in those with 2,000-2,999 population. The proposed sample size using this criterion was 176 kindergartens. Kindergartens in every district were further divided into three groups based on annual school fee, i.e. low (\$5,000.00 or less), medium (\$5,001.00-\$10,000.00) and high (more than \$10,000.00). The sample in each district was by and large evenly distributed by the three school fee ranges.
- 3.4** Sampling frame was obtained from the profile of Kindergartens and Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres 2017/18 School Year⁶. The population of South Asians and kindergarten sample size by district are shown in the table below:

⁴ Official figures at the EDB's website at www.edb.gov.hk/en/about-edb/publications-stat/figures/kg.html

⁵ Census & Statistics Department, 2016 Population By-census, Thematic Report: Ethnic Minorities, p139.

⁶ Official list at the EDB's website at www.chsc.hk/kindergarten/index_en.html

Table 1: South Asian population by district in descending order and sample size take from respective district

District	Population of South Asians (Indian, Nepalese and Pakistani)	Sample Size
Yau Tsim Mong	19,591	20
Yuen Long	7,028	20
Kowloon City	6,388	20
Islands	4,346	20
Kwai Tsing	3,713	15
Central and Western	3,505	15
Sham Shui Po	3,353	15
Eastern	3,246	15
Wan Chai	2,903	12
Kwun Tong	2,465	12
Sai Kung	2,407	12
Tsuen Wan	1,889	
Southern	1,515	
Tuen Mun	1,219	
Wong Tai Sin	1,174	
Sha Tin	1,132	
Tai Po	597	
North	195	
Total:		176

3.5 The sampling frame was further divided into two groups, Half Day kindergartens and Whole Day kindergartens. Proportionate samples were drawn in accordance with the ratio between the two groups in each chosen district as below, which then resulted in a total sample size of 179⁷.

Table 2: Actual sample size across districts

District	Nature of Kindergartens		Total
	Half Day	Whole Day	
Yau Tsim Mong	7	14	21
Yuen Long	5	15	20
Kowloon City	6	13	19
Islands	3	16	19
Kwai Tsing	3	12	15
Central and Western	5	11	16
Sham Shui Po	4	12	16
Eastern	3	14	17
Wan Chai	1	10	11
Kwun Tong	3	10	13
Sai Kung	2	10	12
Total	42	137	179

3.6 Similar to the Unison survey, telephone enquiries using a standard set of questions were made to the sampled kindergartens by “mystery parents” (hereafter referred to as “enquirers”) made up of EOC’s non-Chinese staff and a parent volunteer to serve as a cross-check. Two questionnaires (Annex 1) were filled by the enquirers, one on the responses of the kindergartens (hereafter referred to as “surveyed kindergartens”) and one on the enquirers’ personal impressions of the interaction. The former was built on the question list used in the Unison survey while the latter on the customer service questionnaire by the Community Advice & Listening Line Mental Health Helpline for Wales.

3.7 In view that Indian, Pakistani and Nepalese are the top three ethnicities making up the non-Chinese speaking student population in the public school system, the mystery parents presented themselves as belonging to one of

⁷ The final sample size deviated slightly from the proposed one (179 instead of 176) due to the need to proportionately represent Half Day & Whole Day kindergartens.

these ethnicities in a manner that ensured equal representation, though often the ethnicity was not required to be mentioned during the questioning.

3.8 The telephone survey was carried out between 28 October 2017 and 3 November 2017, after which a review of the sampled kindergartens' websites was conducted to rate the accessibility of the necessary information for parents to make their school choices. The whole data collection process was completed by 31 December 2017.

3.9 Major attributes under measurement in the three questionnaires were as follows:

Table 3: Major attributes measured in the survey

Questionnaire	Attributes
Response of surveyed kindergartens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General response towards accepting applications from NCS children • Language support in the admission process • Chinese proficiency as a selection criteria • Support for NCS students in learning Chinese • Support for NCS parents in communicating with the kindergarten
Enquiry experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information quality • Helpfulness • Understanding of the questions • Length of response time • Overall impression of the enquiry experience
Webpage information accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essential admission information in English (e.g. admission schedule, application form, selection criteria, etc.) • Basic school information in English (e.g. school fee, class structure, curriculum, etc.) • Additional information for NCS applicants (e.g. support for NCS students, etc.)

3.10 Direct quotes from the respondents of the surveyed kindergartens were also recorded for analysis.

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 Duration of the interviews

4.1.1 The mean interview duration was 6.4 minutes (standard deviation=2.8). The longest and the shortest interview duration recorded were 15 minutes and 1 minute respectively.

4.2 Gender of the respondents

4.2.1 Of the total, 98.3% respondents were female.

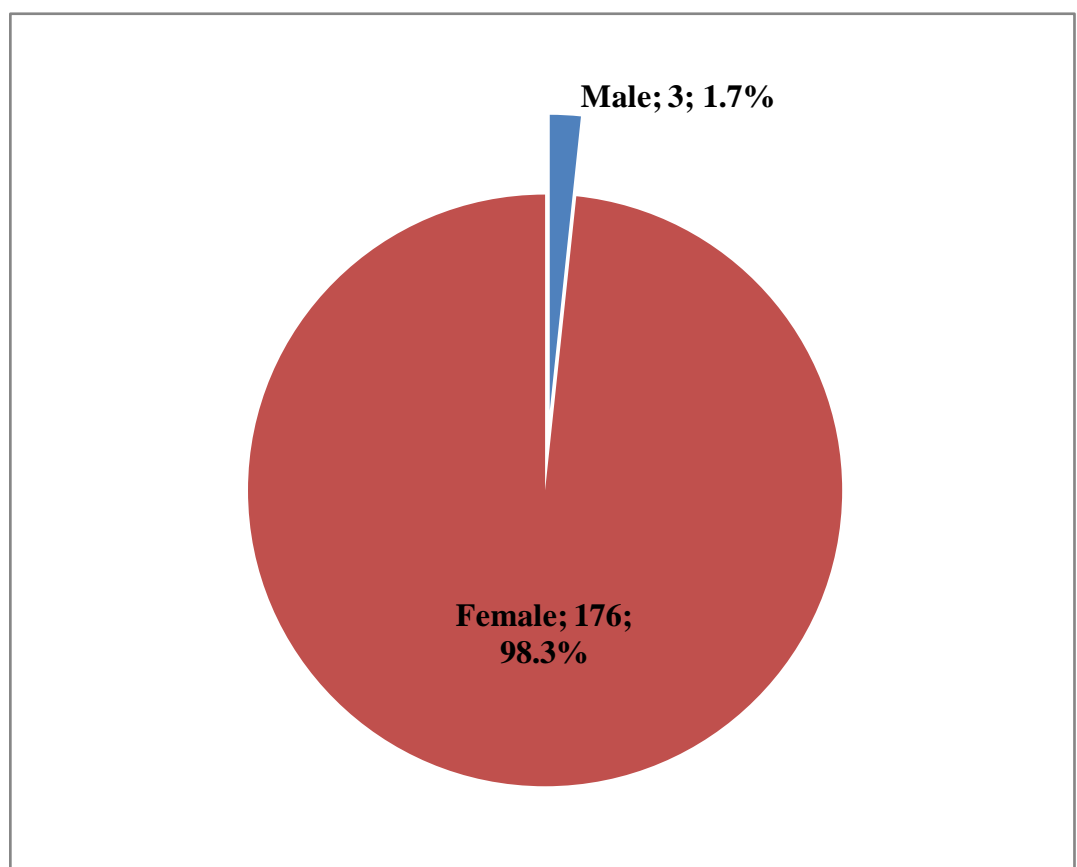


Figure 1: Gender of the respondents (N=179)

4.3 Kindergartens with and without NCS students

4.3.1 Of the total valid responses from 171 surveyed kindergartens, around 60% (N=102) responded that they have admitted NCS students whereas the rest, 40% (N=69) said that they did not have NCS students at present. The number of NCS students varied from one student to around 40⁸.

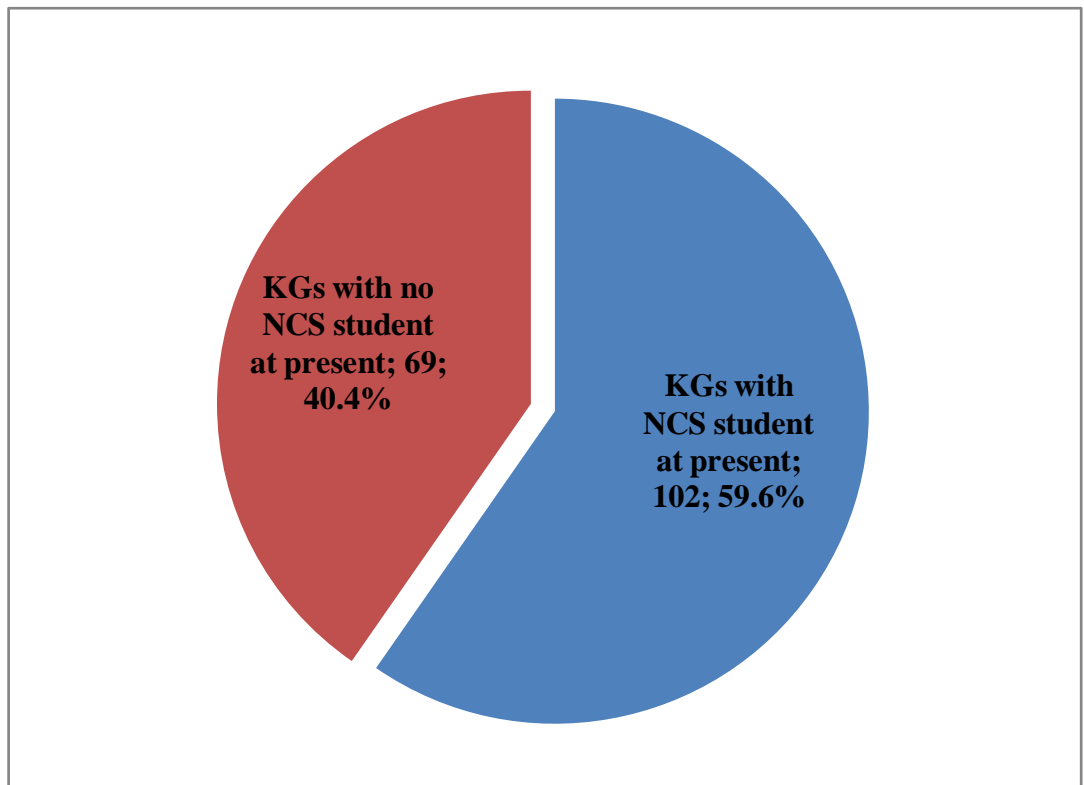


Figure 2: Kindergartens (KGs) with and without NCS students at present (N=171)

⁸ There were missing information in eight enquires. In this group, some respondents ended the conversation before the question was asked; some simply told the enquirers to check the website; and one did not know the answer.

4.4 Acceptance of applications from NCS children

4.4.1 A majority (83.8%) of surveyed kindergartens responded in the affirmative to accepting applications of NCS children (N=150).

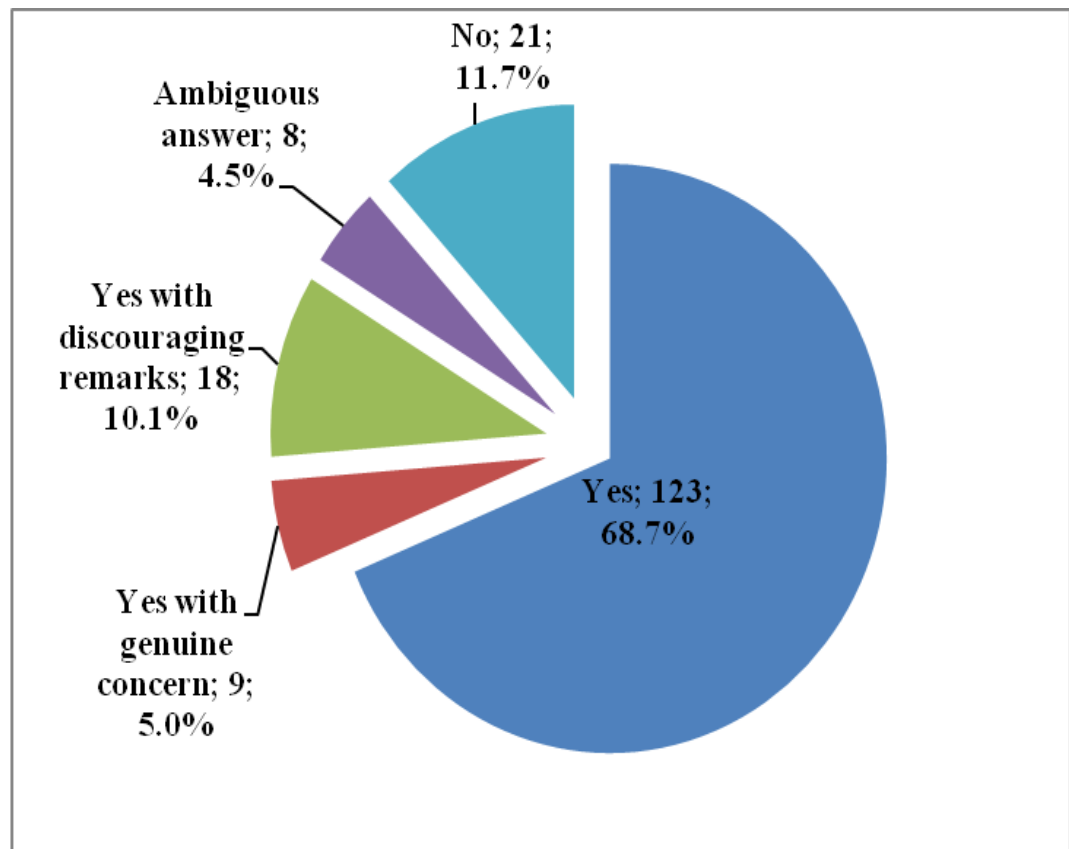


Figure 3: Acceptance of applications from NCS applicants (N=179)

4.4.2 Among those who said “Yes”, 27 provided additional “Yes, but” remarks. Almost all these “Yes, but” responses mentioned that their kindergartens used Chinese as the teaching medium. Some (N=9) provided further details of the support and limitations of the kindergartens for the enquirers to make a well-informed choice.

Examples: “If you want your child to learn Chinese, our school is a good choice. However, since the parents cannot speak Chinese, language practice at home will be limited.” “We have non-Chinese teaching assistant for upper classes. In junior classes, the teachers will teach in Cantonese and can speak some English to assist.”

4.4.3 On the other hand, the enquirers found some “Yes, but” responses (N=18) discouraging.

Examples: “We are a Chinese medium of instruction (CMI) school.”
 “Why don’t you choose an international school?”; “Yes, you can apply but there is no guarantee.”

4.4.4 For the kindergartens that provided declining (N=21) and ambiguous responses (N=8) to whether or not they would accept NCS applicants, the remarks included “We are a Chinese/local school”, “It’s difficult for the child to adapt”, “We have never admitted NCS students before.”

4.4.5 Totally, 47 (26.3%) surveyed kindergartens responded negatively by either declining, discouraging or making highly ambiguous/ unclear responses to the enquirers.

4.4.6 No significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) is found using the chi-square test of independence between the attitude of kindergartens towards accepting NCS applicants and school fee or nature of the kindergarten (Half day or Whole day). However, kindergartens with NCS students (N=102) were found to provide less negative responses than those without NCS students (N=69). Only 15.7% of the former group replied with negative responses while over 42% of the latter group did.

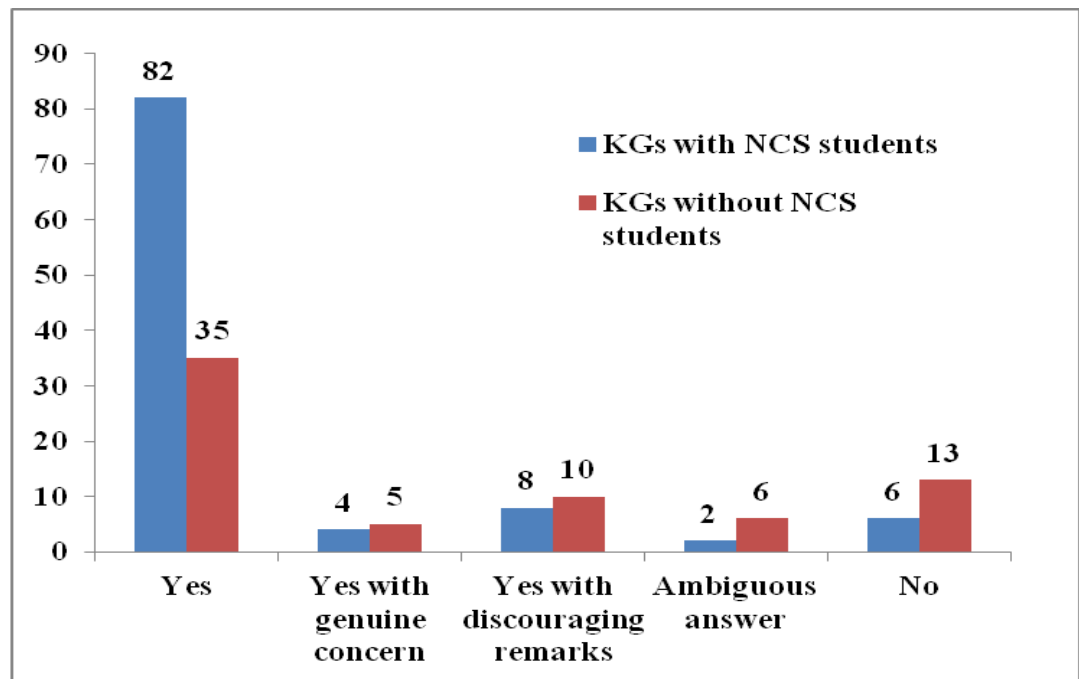


Figure 4: Attitude among kindergartens with or without NCS students. (N=171; please refer to 4.3.1)

4.5 Language of admission interview

4.5.1 Among the 179 surveyed kindergartens, slightly less than three-fourths (72.6%) replied that they only used Chinese/Cantonese as the language of interview, about one-fourth (22.9%) used Chinese and English while only two schools (1.1%) used English as the language of interview. The other responses included those from schools that did not conduct an admission interview (instead, for example, holding a ballot if the school places were oversubscribed etc.) or gave no clear answer.

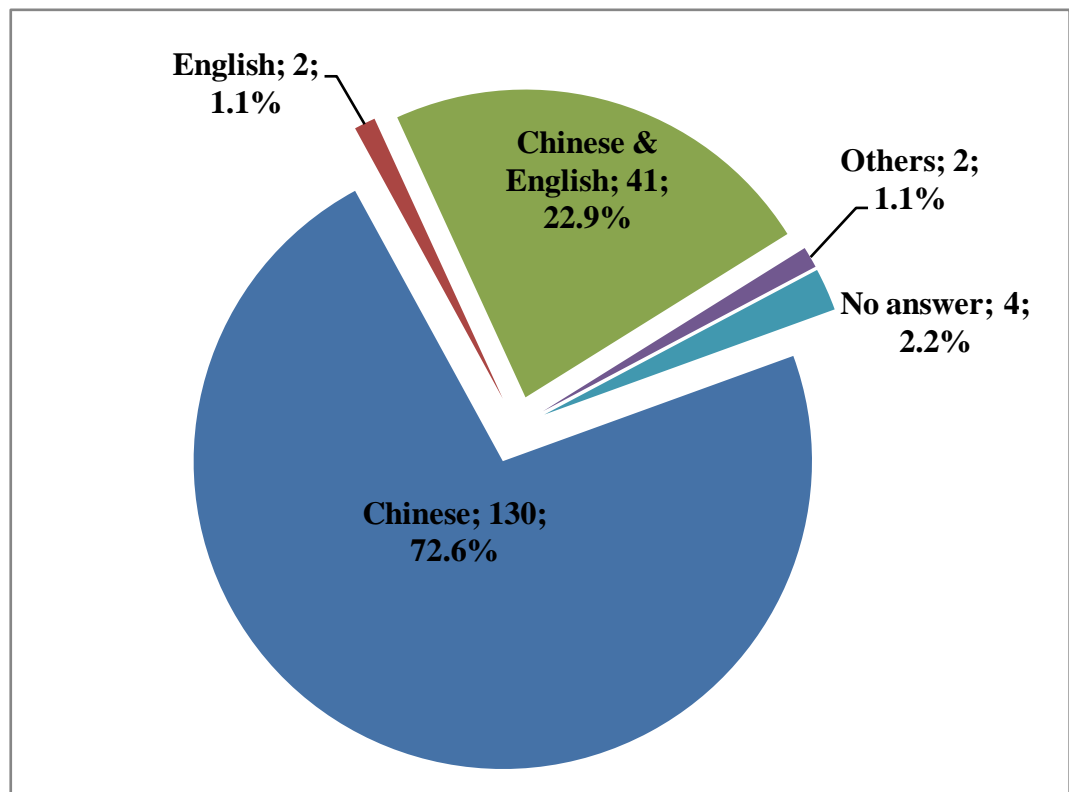


Figure 5: Language of admission interview (N=179)

4.5.2 The results are consistent with the findings of the Unison survey in which 62% of the kindergartens surveyed were found to conduct interviews in Chinese; 9% were not willing to disclose information; and 12% of the phone calls were not answered or lines were cut.

4.5.3 Generally, a higher percentage (30.6%) of surveyed kindergartens with NCS students offered English/both Chinese & English as the language of admission interview at the beginning of the enquiries compared with only 15.9% of those without NCS students.

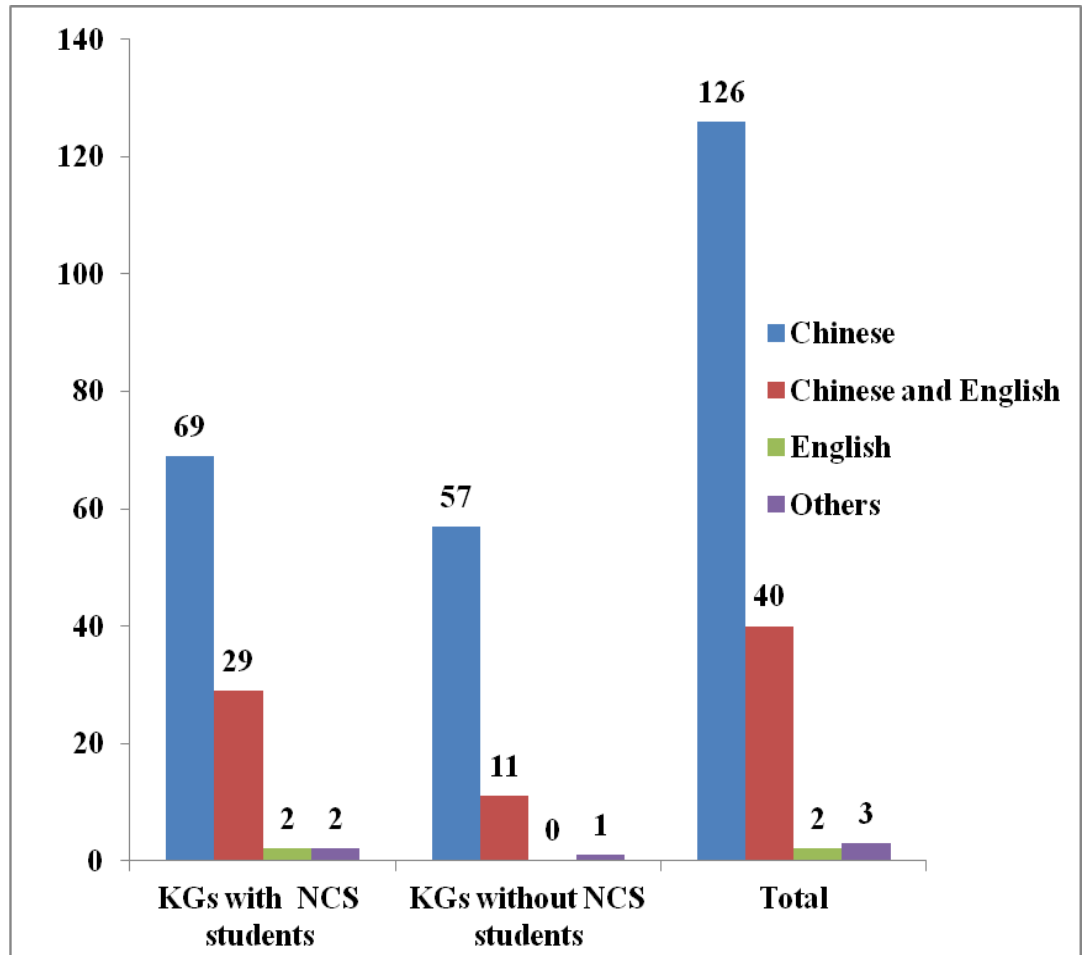


Figure 6: Language of admission interview in kindergartens with and without NCS students (N=171; please refer to 4.3.1)

4.5.4 For the 130 surveyed kindergartens conducting interviews in Chinese/Cantonese, the respondents were asked if they could change the interview language to English. Ninety-five kindergartens (73.1%) agreed to the request. Of the 18 kindergartens which refused, only five kindergartens said they would allow the applicant to bring someone along to interpret. The most commonly cited reasons for not making language adjustment included “We are a Chinese school” (N=7) and “It’s a group interview with other Chinese speaking children” (N=7).

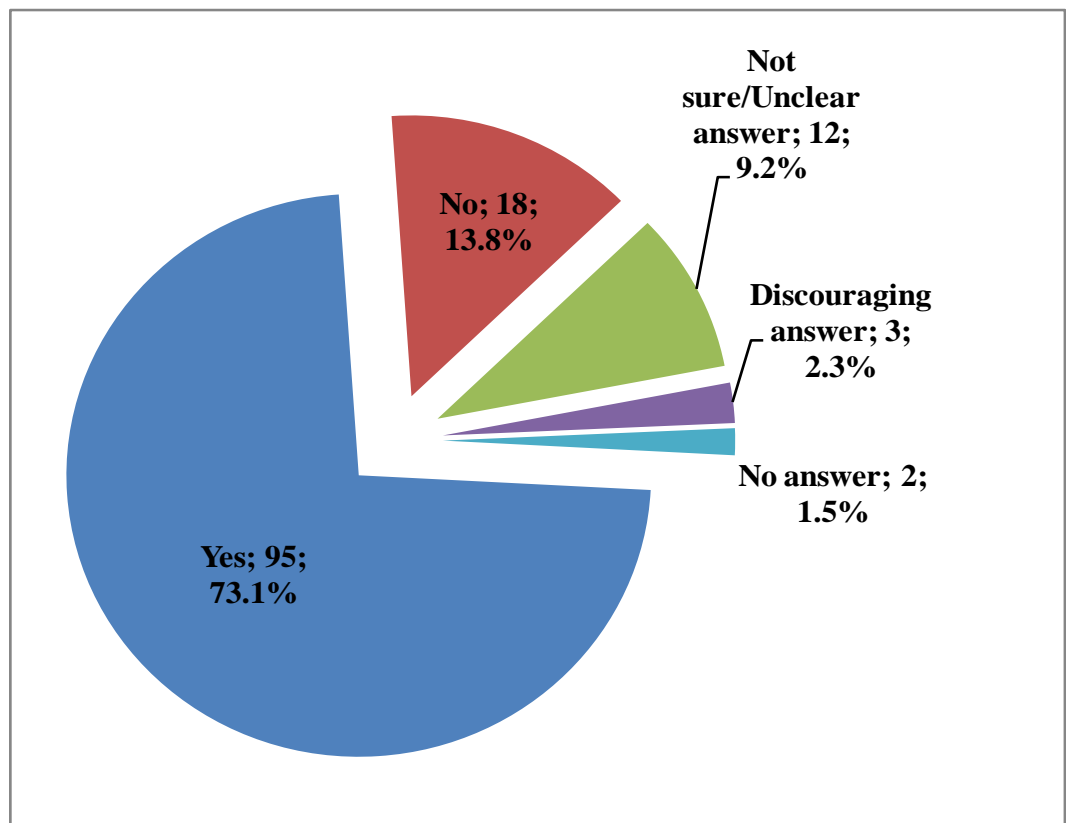


Figure 7: Willingness of schools (conducting admission interviews in Chinese) to conduct interviews in English for NCS applicants (N=130; including 2 without mentioning whether there were existing NCS students in their schools)

4.5.5 Compared with the Unison survey, there is a growth in the percentage of kindergartens willing to make adjustments to the language of interview (from 45% to 73.1%),

4.5.6 For the surveyed kindergartens with NCS students, over 82.6% agreed to arrange English interviews while 13% did not.

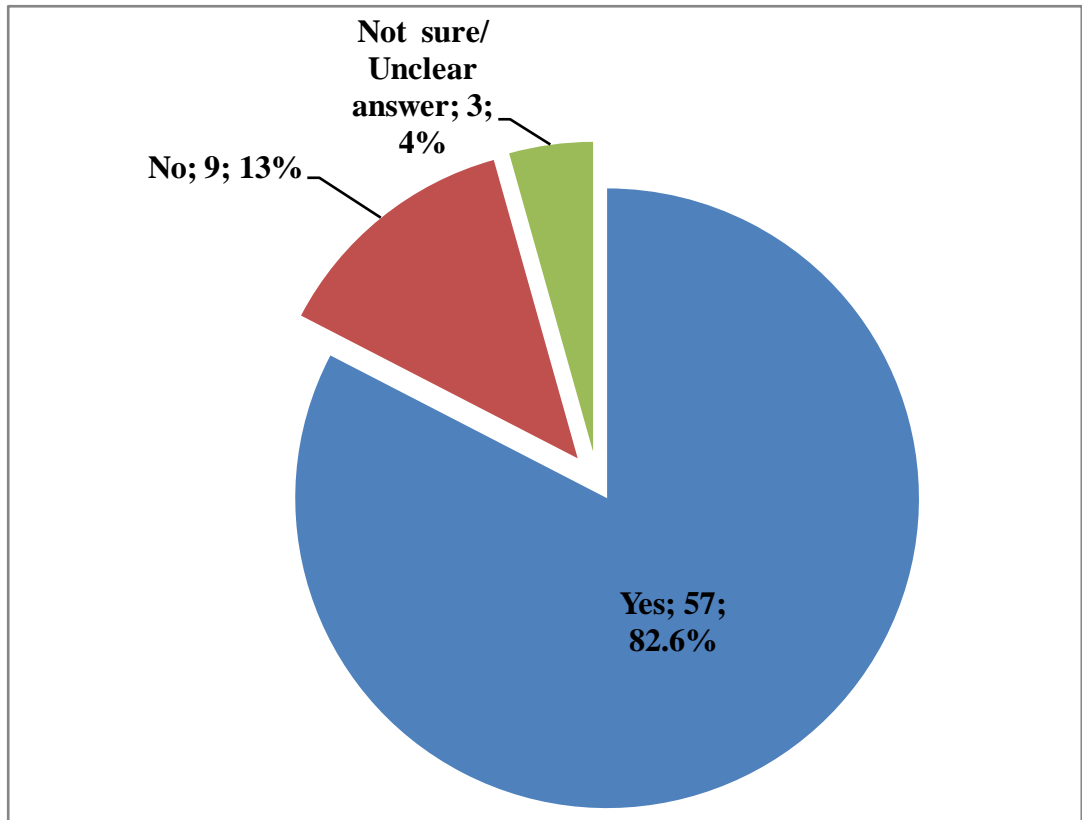


Figure 8: Willingness of schools (with NCS students and conducting admission interviews in Chinese) to conduct interviews in English for NCS applicants (N=69)

4.5.7 Of the surveyed kindergartens without NCS students, 63.2% agreed to conduct the admission interview in English for NCS applicants when asked, whereas 15.8% said they could not and another 15.8% did not provide a direct answer.

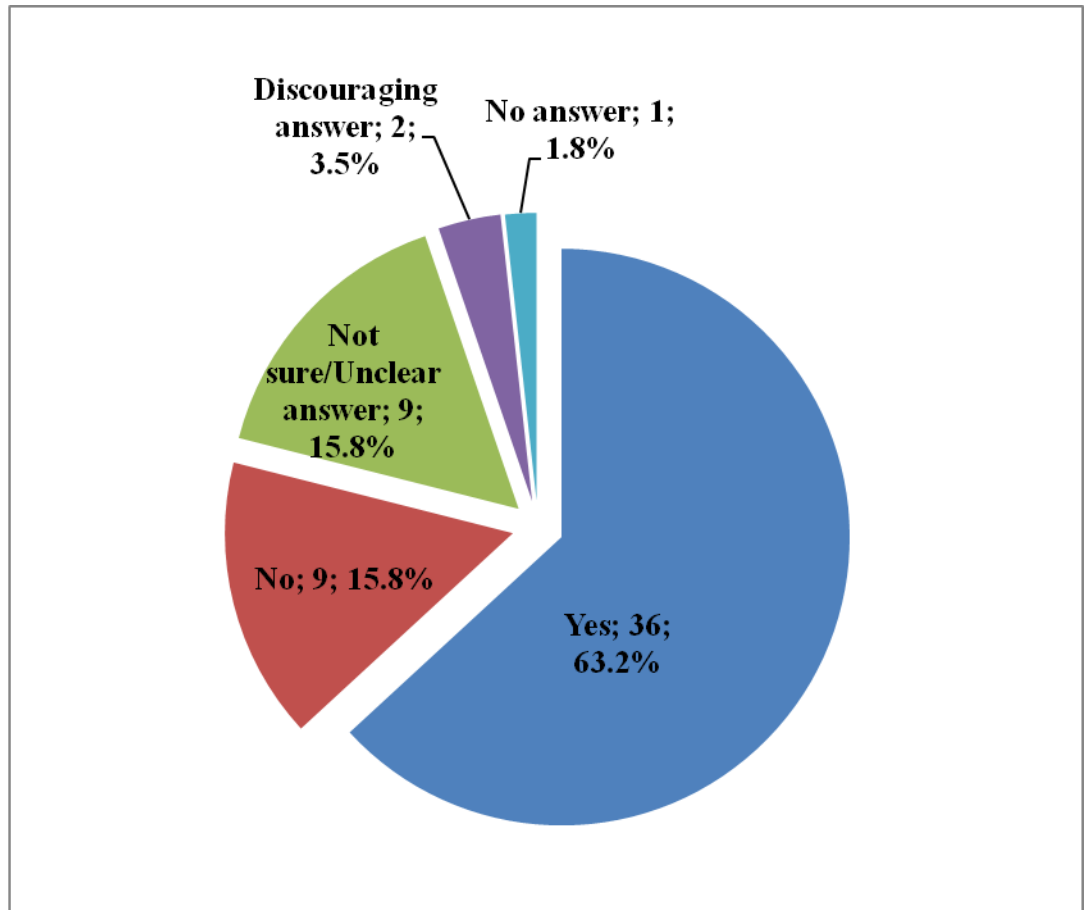


Figure 9: Willingness of schools (without NCS students and conducting admission interviews in Chinese) to conduct interviews in English for NCS applicants (NCS=57)

4.5.8 For both groups, the major reasons for not providing adjustment were, “We’re a Chinese school” and “We conduct group interview with Chinese speaking students”.

4.6 Chinese proficiency as a selection criterion for admission

4.6.1 Only 156 respondents from the surveyed kindergartens provided valid answers to this question. Among them, almost three-fourths (73.1%) replied that Chinese was not a selection criterion for admission. However, of the 32 kindergartens which took Chinese proficiency as a selection factor, only five considered replacing it with alternative criteria⁹.

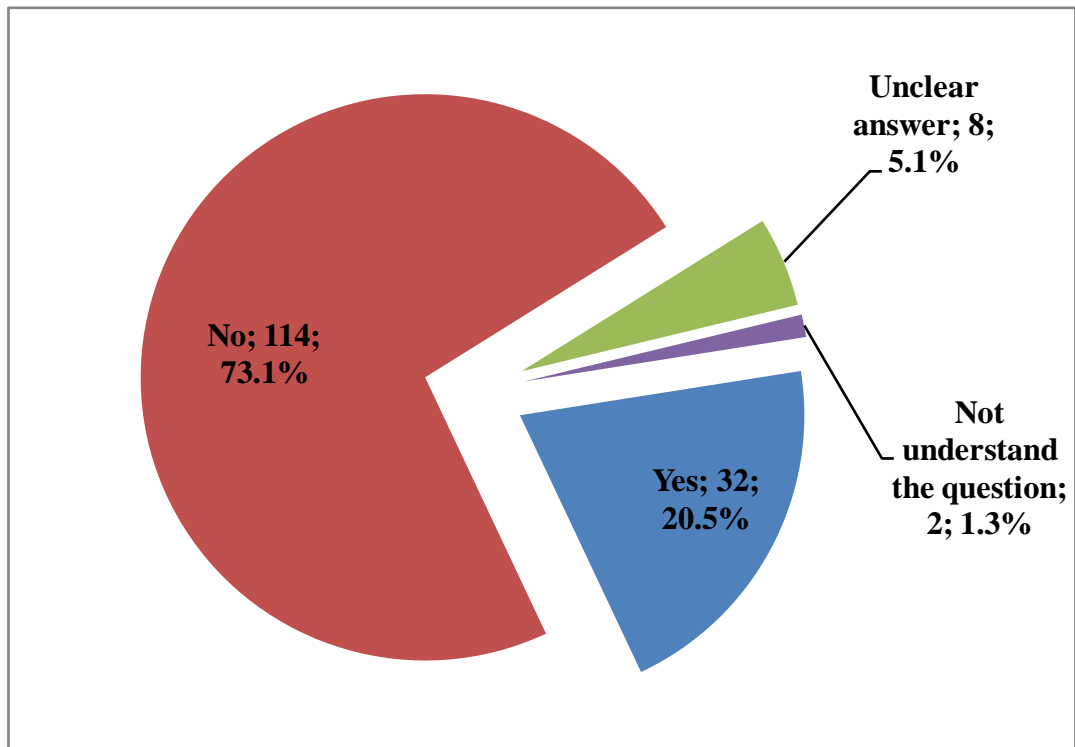


Figure 10: Chinese proficiency as a selection criterion (N=156)

4.6.2 However, one has to bear in mind that even though Chinese proficiency may not be cited as a selection criterion by the majority of the surveyed kindergartens, some schools (N=14) responded that applicants would be gauged on the basis of their ability to follow instructions and interact with others. In these cases, communication in Chinese may still be a hidden factor determining admission.

4.6.3 There is a clear difference in response between kindergartens with and without NCS students. Of the kindergartens with NCS students, only

⁹ 10 kindergartens did not give a clear response to this question or the respondents did not understand the question.

7.4% cited Chinese as a selection criterion, but over 40% of those without NCS students selected students by their Chinese proficiency.

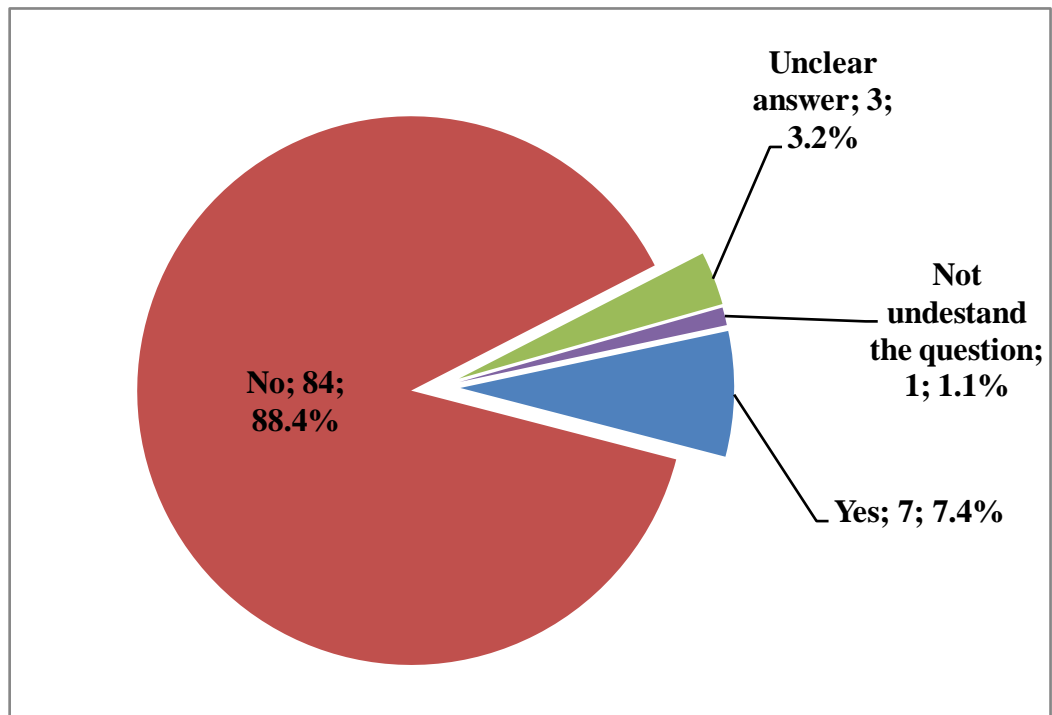


Figure 11: Whether Chinese is a selection criterion in schools with NCS students (N=95)

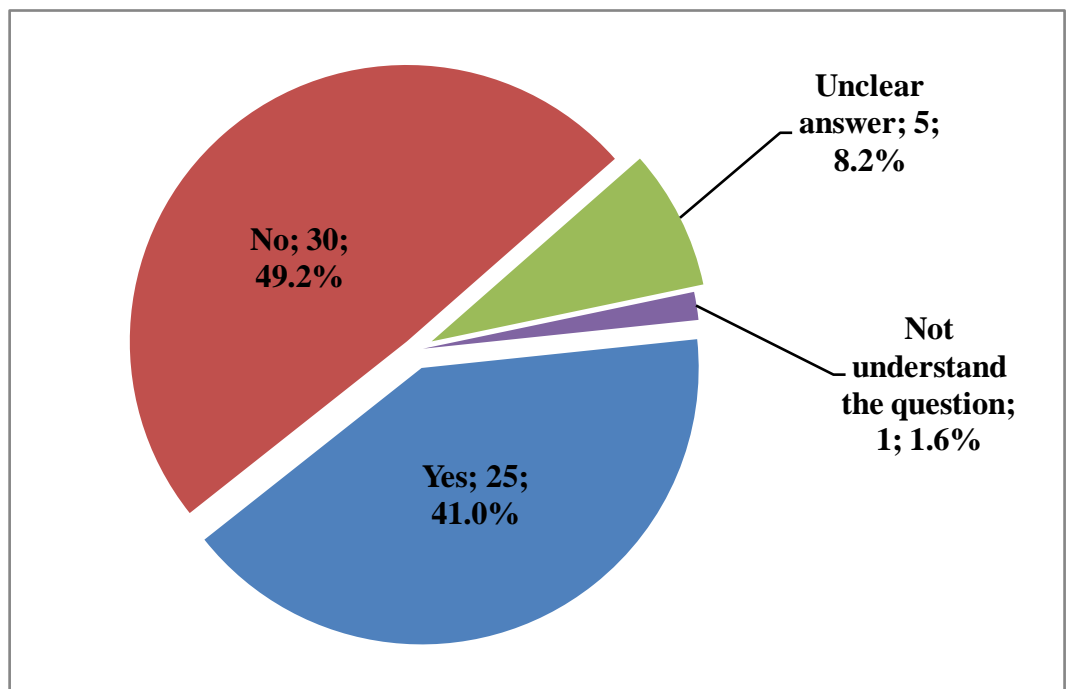


Figure 12: Whether Chinese is a selection criterion in schools without NCS students (N=61)

4.7 Support for NCS students in learning Chinese

4.7.1 68.6% of the surveyed kindergartens with NCS students responded that there was support in learning Chinese. Most cited examples were “Teacher will use English and Chinese/Supplementary instructions will be given in English (N=25)”, “Additional teaching staff will be arranged” (N=15). Eleven stated the provision of extra lessons/additional tutorials. Four mentioned that they have participated in the University-school Support Programme arranged by the EDB.

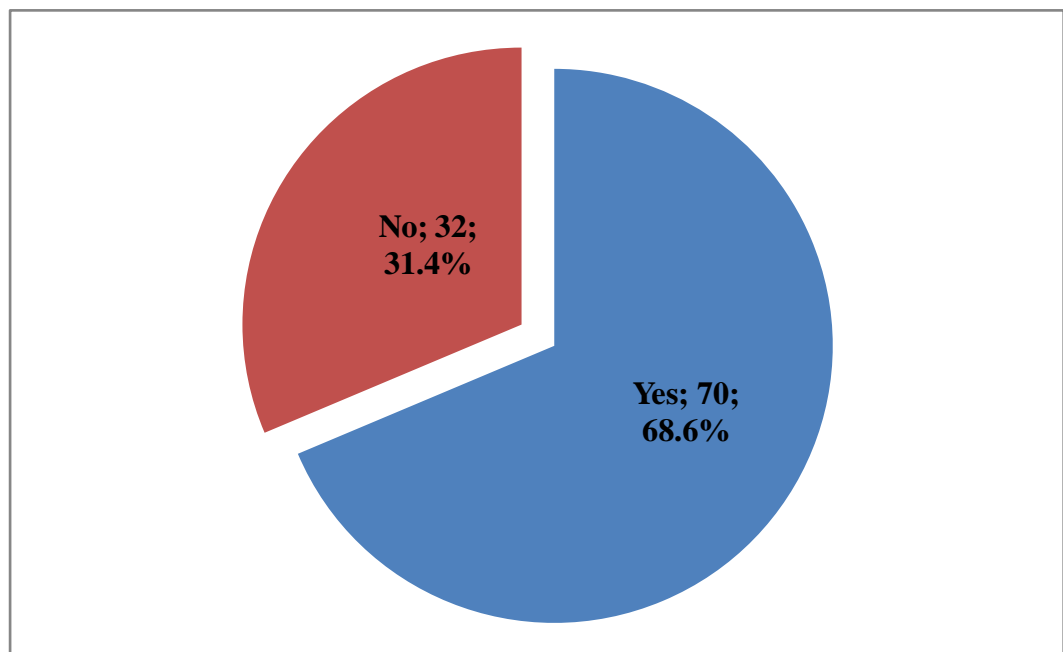


Figure 13: Support in learning Chinese in schools with NCS students (N=102)

4.7.2 Surprisingly, over 30% of the kindergartens with NCS students did not provide additional support for them to learn Chinese. Reasons for the absence of support included “Children would understand soon”, “There is no need for support because one of the parents could speak Chinese”, etc. Many (N=11 among those schools with NCS students and did not provide additional support for them to learn Chinese) simply did not provide a clear explanation of the “No” answer to this question.

4.7.3 For the kindergartens without NCS students, only 39.1% responded that they would provide support in learning Chinese if they admit an NCS student. The assistance they said they would offer were mostly, “Teacher will use a bit of English and body language to help” and “Teachers will assist the students”. No structured programmes, such as additional tutorials, homework adjustment, etc, were in their repertoire.

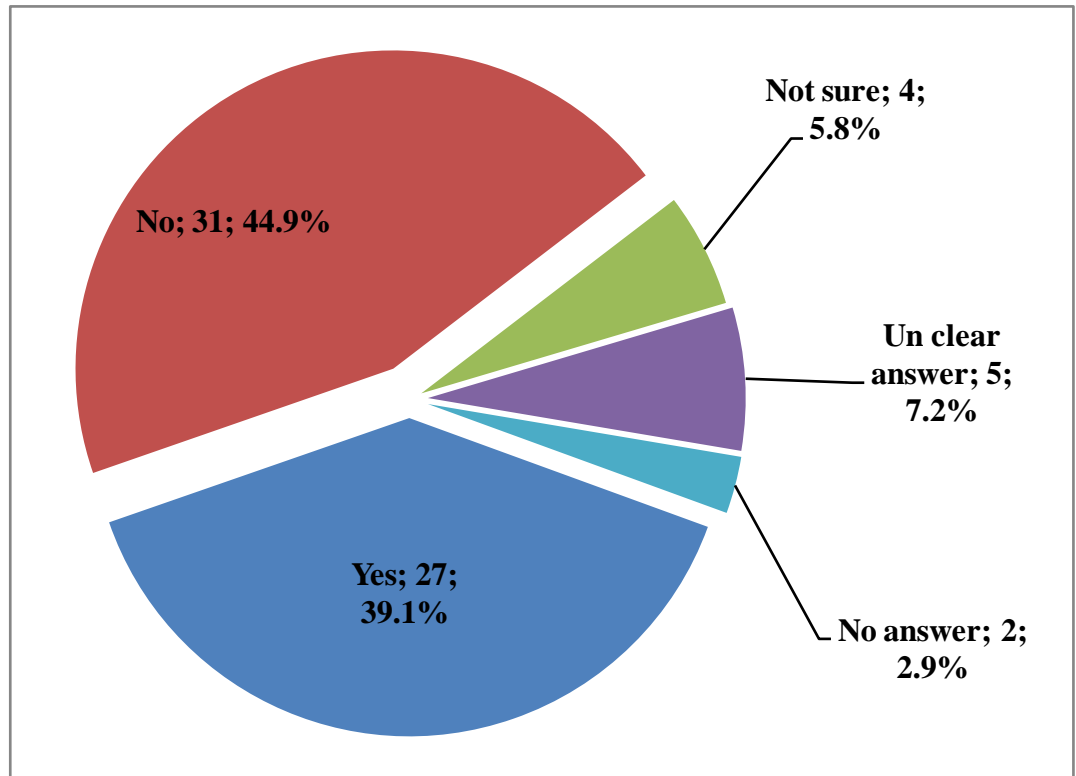


Figure 14: Whether any support in learning Chinese in schools without NCS students will be provided, if NCS students are admitted (N=69)

4.7.4 Regarding the unavailability of support, many attribute it to their lack of experience with NCS students (N=10).

4.8 Support for EM parents - school notices

4.8.1 171 respondents of surveyed kindergartens provided valid answers to this question as the enquirers were unable to ask this question in 8 enquiries. Among the valid responses, almost two-thirds of the kindergartens surveyed (67.3%) used Chinese language notices to communicate with parents, which is similar to the findings of the Unison survey of 2015 (60%).

4.8.2 When asked whether translation support would be provided, 82 out of 115 (71.3%) kindergartens responded that they would provide oral or written translation, 23 schools (20%) said they would not provide the assistance whereas 10 schools (8.7%) gave no clear answer. Compared with the findings of the Unison survey, there is significant growth in percentage of kindergartens offering language support with school notices (from 21% in 2015 to 71.3% in 2017).

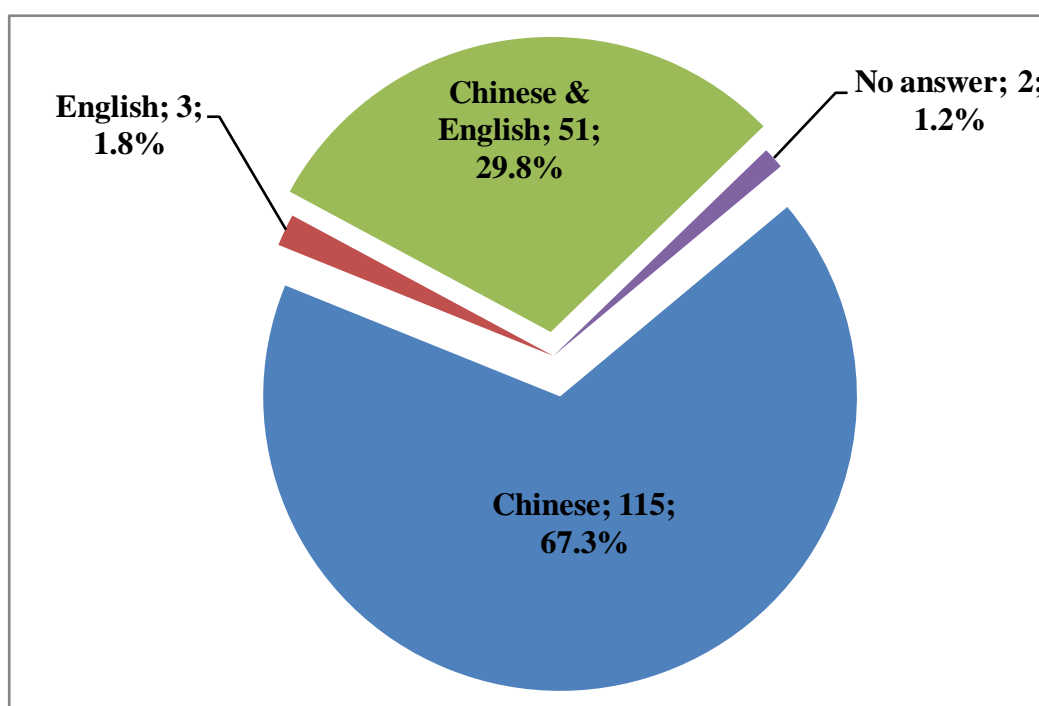


Figure 15: Language of kindergartens' notices (N=171)

4.8.3 Again, kindergartens with NCS students were more ready to provide English/bilingual notices for parents (47%). For those without NCS students, only 8.7% responded that they would provide English/bilingual notice if they admitted NCS students.

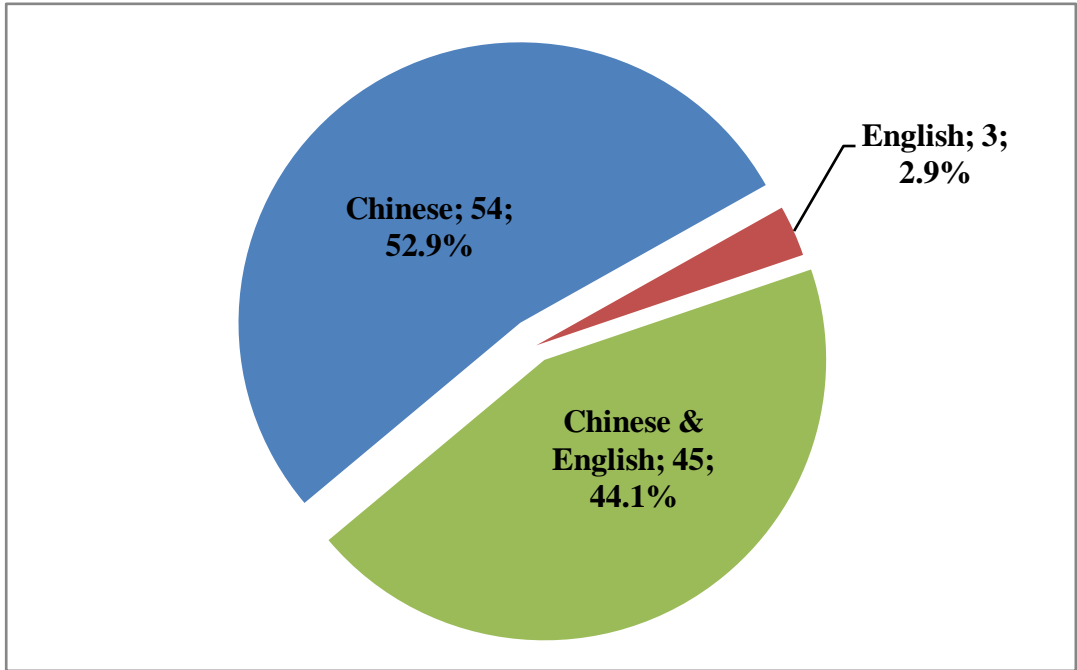


Figure 16: Language of kindergartens' notices in schools with NCS students (N=102)

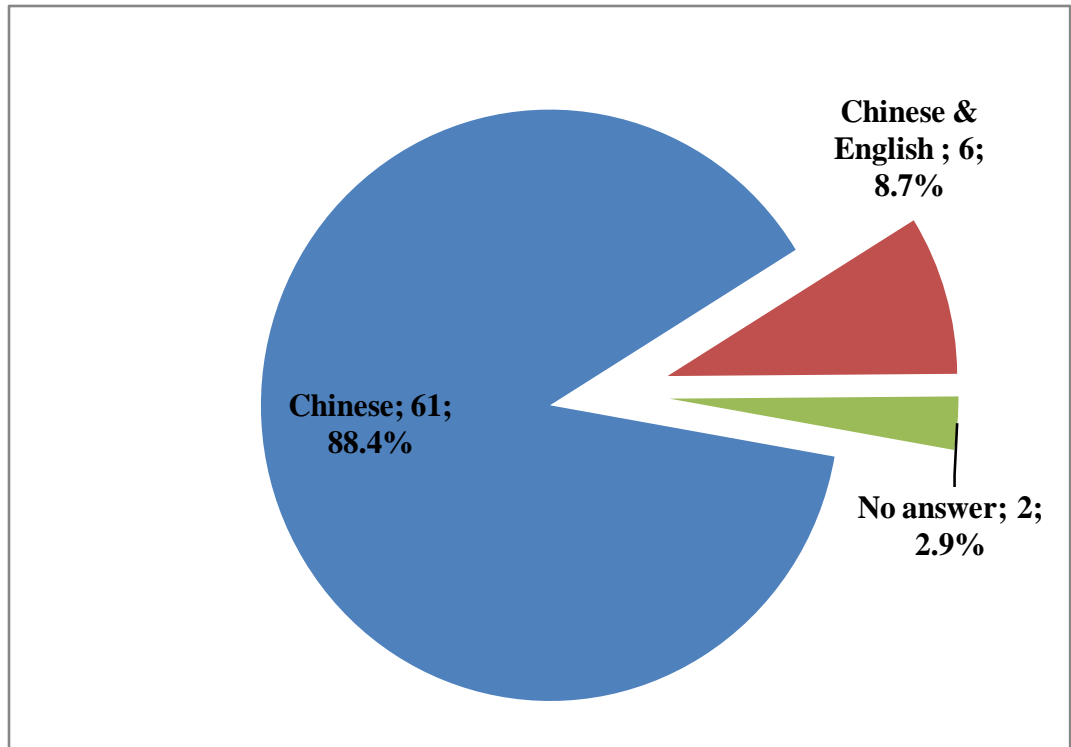


Figure 17: Language of kindergartens' notices in schools without NCS students (N=69)

4.8.4 For the kindergartens issuing school notices in Chinese only, a majority responded that they would provide assistance for EM parents. Similar to the pattern mentioned in the previous section, kindergartens without NCS students were more unlikely or uncertain to offer such assistance.

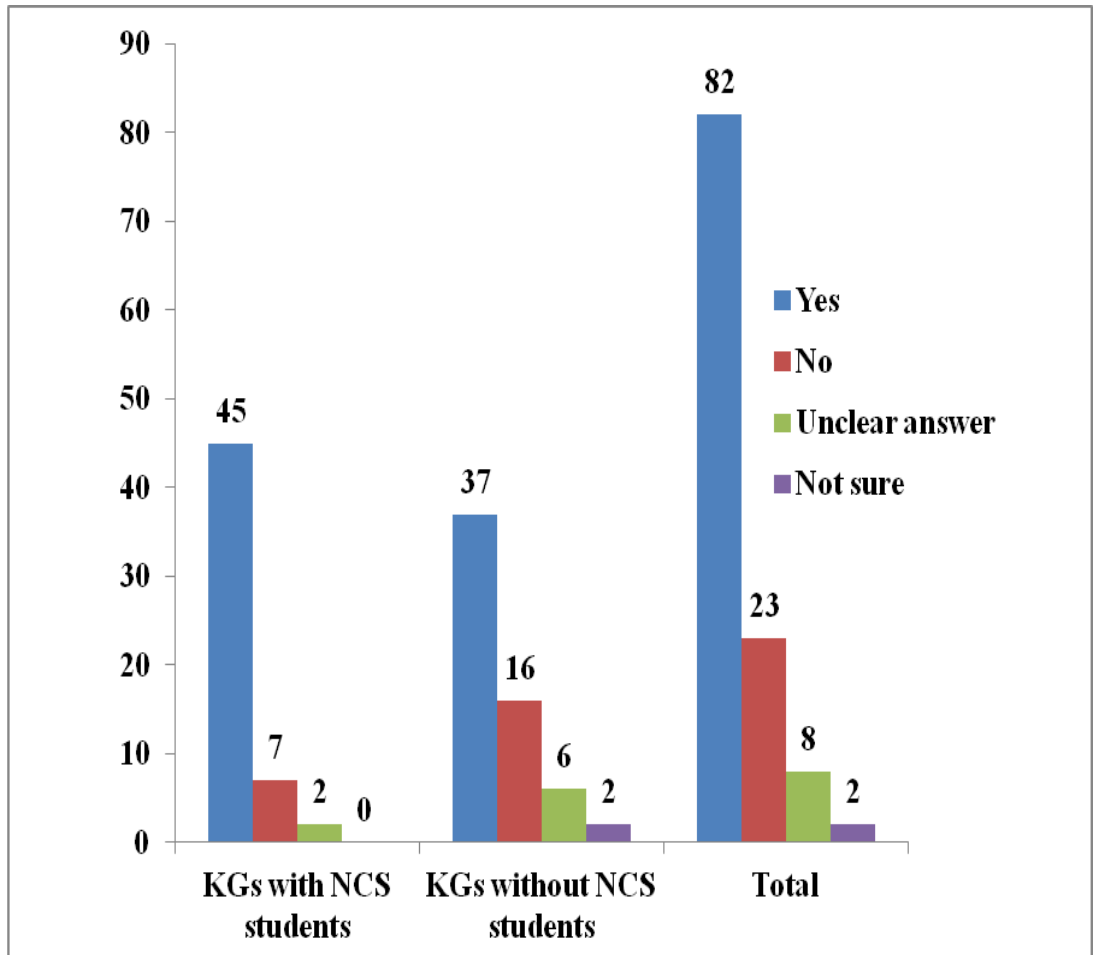


Figure 18: Schools with and without NCS students willing to provide help for NCS parents to understand school notices. (N=115)

4.8.5 Translating the key message of the notice into English, providing a verbal translation of the notice to parents, etc. were the most commonly mentioned examples of assistance offered to parents to understand school notices which were in Chinese.

4.9 Support to NCS parents- availability of essential information in English on webpage

4.9.1 Over 40% of the surveyed kindergartens, webpages were totally in Chinese. All information, in some cases even the school name was in Chinese only. These pages are completely inaccessible for EM parents.

4.9.2 Another 30.2% of the kindergartens surveyed uploaded bilingual admission information on the website as advised by the EDB. However, most of the other essential information such as school fee, curriculum, class structure etc. is in Chinese only, making it mostly inaccessible for EM parents. Only less than 30% of the kindergartens were found to have developed partially or fully accessible webpages for NCS parents, let alone information on support for NCS students¹⁰.

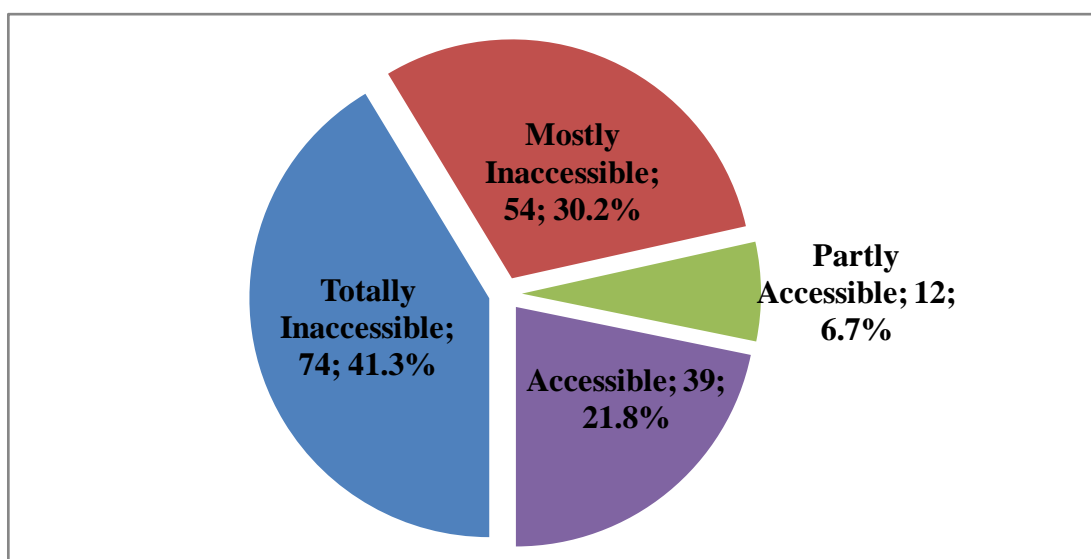


Figure 19: Cross-checking the accessibility of kindergartens' websites (N=179)

¹⁰ Table 4: Assessment criteria for the accessibility of the kindergartens webpage

Accessibility	Criteria
Mostly Available/ Accessible	The website is fully bilingual
Partially Available/ Accessible	Keys as well as some contents are in English including the application form, support to NCS parent/student, background information, school notices
Mostly Unavailable/ Inaccessible	Only the keys are in English but not the content (menu heads/topics may be in English AND/OR application form only is bilingual/English)
Totally Unavailable/ Inaccessible	Everything is in Chinese only except perhaps the name of the school.

4.10 Position of the respondents

4.10.1 A majority of the respondents agreed to provide their names and titles for the enquiries (N=147). Half of them were teachers (including headteachers and NET teachers). A significant number of the enquiries were responded to by school administration (N=28) including principals, vice-principals, supervisors, deputy heads, etc.

4.11 General impressions of the enquiry experience

4.11.1 The interviewers were required to rate each call in terms of the respondent manner, quality of information, helpfulness, length of response time, overall experience and understanding of the enquirer's questions. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being the least satisfactory and 10 the most satisfactory). The mean score ranged from 6.6 to 7.4 with Helpfulness ranking the highest among all the attributes and Overall Experience ranking the lowest.

Table 5: General impressions of the enquiry experience

Questions	Frequency	Mean score
Did the kindergarten staff provide you with the information that you needed?	179	6.9
Was the kindergarten staff polite and helpful when dealing with your call?	179	7.4
How would you rate the enquiry experience overall?	179	6.6
Do you feel you were given enough time to ask your questions?	179	6.8
Do you feel that the staff who answered your call understood your questions?	179	6.9

4.11.2 When the scores are compared between kindergartens with and without NCS students, it is observed that satisfaction rates are higher across all attributes for kindergartens with NCS students than those without. The widest gap between the two sets of kindergartens is on Overall Experience (1.2) while the lowest is in Helpfulness (0.7).

Table 6: General impressions of the enquiry experience in schools with and without NCS students

Nature	Respondent's Attitude measuring questions				
	Quality of information	Helpfulness & politeness	Overall experience	Length of response time	Understanding of the questions
KGs with NCS students (102)	7.6	7.9	7.3	7.4	7.4
KGs without NCS students (69)	6.5	7.2	6.1	6.3	6.5

4.11.3 A South Asian parent volunteer was also requested to call 25 sampled kindergartens again to cross-check the experience. The mean scores for all attributes were uniformly 7.5, which indicated consistency with the enquirers' rating.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Concentration of NCS students in kindergartens

5.1.1 Around 57% of the surveyed kindergartens responded as having admitted NCS students, which mirrored the 2016/17 official statistics from the EDB of 53.4% (468¹¹ out of 876¹² local kindergartens had admitted NCS students). The sample is considered representative of the kindergarten sector.

5.1.2 In the last three years, approximately one in four NCS student has been studying in a kindergarten with over 70% NCS student population (23.7%, 27.2% and 25.2% in 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 school year respectively)¹³. Although the rate is lower than those in primary schools and secondary schools (40.6% and 36.2% in 2016/17 school year respectively), it is still a significant population which are most likely studying in a language environment that is not conducive to the learning of Chinese and interaction with mainstream Chinese peers. It is universally recognized by educationists and linguists that an early start helps to lay a strong foundation for learning of language and integration in primary schools.

5.2 Kindergartens' attitudes towards EM applicants

5.2.1 11.7% of kindergartens surveyed declined applications from EM children at the admission stage. Most of them gave the reason that their schools are teaching in Chinese and the applying child cannot meet the language level required. This reflected their lack of awareness that such language criteria in admission may be potential indirect discrimination towards non-Chinese children if there is no justifiable reason. Requiring an EM child under the age of three, coming from a home language environment, to possess proficiency in Chinese language on a par with Chinese kids at this entry point into formal education is unrealistic. Meanwhile, scholars generally agree that NCS children could acquire Chinese proficiency more speedily when they

¹¹ Data provided by EDB on 3 January 2018 upon EOC's request.

¹² Official figures provided at the EDB's website at www.edb.gov.hk/en/about-edb/publications-stat/figures/kg.html.

¹³ Same as 1.

are put in an immersed Chinese environment.

- 5.2.2 Although 83.8% of surveyed kindergartens responded in the affirmative to accepting applications of EM children, it would be misleading to conclude that all kindergartens in this group welcome NCS applicants. On deeper analysis of their responses, we found that 12% of them (18 out of 150) did not actually reject but tried to dissuade our enquirers from making the application by stressing, sometimes repeatedly, that they taught in Chinese; suggesting the enquirers approach international schools; and making additional discouraging remarks such as “you may apply but there is no guarantee.”
- 5.2.3 When the responses are regrouped, around one in four (26.3%) kindergartens gave rejecting, discouraging or highly ambiguous responses to the admission enquiries. EM parents in general will easily be turned away by these responses.
- 5.2.4 On the other hand, according to the enquirers’ assessment of the respondents’ attitude in terms of information quality, helpfulness, understanding of the questions, length of response time and overall quality of the enquiry experience, the scores ranged from 6.6 to 7.4 (out of 10) across these five attributes. A second check from an EM volunteer of South Asian ethnicity confirmed the pattern (mean=7.5 for all attributes). The enquirers generally found that the respondents were reasonably polite and tried their best to answer the questions even though some were actually trying to dissuade the enquirers from applying.
- 5.2.5 The kindergarten’s attitude may be directly related to the identity of the person answering. While many of the enquiries were responded to by teachers (75 out of 147 known identities), 28 enquiries were handled by senior school administrators, such as principals/supervisors, vice/deputy principals, headmistresses, etc. In these responses, information was usually more detailed and clearer than that provided by general office staff, probably due to the level of English and understanding of school operations.

5.3 Language support for admission interview

- 5.3.1 Most surveyed kindergartens (72.6%) conducted admission interviews in Chinese/Cantonese but a significant number of kindergartens agreed to change the interview language to English (73.1%, up from 45% in 2015) upon further request. Unless there is any justifiable reason, exercising uniform Chinese language requirement in the kindergarten admission process may constitute indirect race discrimination towards EMs.
- 5.3.2 Besides, many EM parents may not go as far as to ask for language adjustment or support and simply accept that their child cannot meet the language requirement. In responding to NCS applicants, it would be more culturally sensitive and welcoming if the kindergartens could state upfront their willingness to conduct interviews in English when enquired, rather than the initial response of “Chinese only”, which may turn away non-Chinese parents who may not delve deeper.
- 5.3.3 Besides, this response pattern may reflect that many kindergartens are not well prepared to handle applications from NCS children. Some kindergarten staff were not clear about the arrangement and had to ask superiors for advice or simply referred the calls to their principals. Again, as many EM parents may not make further enquiries or requests, they may not get the chance to have their calls referred to senior teachers or the principal.

5.4 Chinese as a selection criteria

- 5.4.1 A significant proportion (N=32, 20.5%), though not the majority, of kindergartens surveyed took Chinese language proficiency as a selection criteria for admission, which put EM children in a very disadvantageous position. Among these kindergartens, only five agreed to consider replacing it with alternative criteria.
- 5.4.2 The group of surveyed kindergartens which are not willing to adjust interview language (N=35) and those that use Chinese proficiency as a selection criteria (N=32) are very much overlapping. This reflects that there is a section of kindergartens which are relatively unrelenting in

screening children by Chinese proficiency and may be unaware that unjustifiable uniform Chinese language requirement as selection criteria may constitute indirect race discrimination against EMs.

5.5 Support for learning Chinese

- 5.5.1 Over 30% of the surveyed kindergartens with NCS students responded that they did NOT provide support to help the students to learn Chinese. Many of them did not give a clear reason for that (N=11) while most of the others (N=16) told the enquirers that their NCS students learnt fast in the environment without the need for additional support.
- 5.5.2 Among the surveyed kindergartens having extra support for their NCS students, over half provided additional teaching assistance in lessons, such as extra teachers, NET teachers, supplementary instructions in English, etc. Very few reported targeted Chinese training for NCS students (N=7) such as tutorials, extra lessons, etc. Only four mentioned support from the University-School Support Programme arranged by the EDB.
- 5.5.3 Kindergartens that do not have any NCS students currently (N=69) are generally unprepared to provide support even if they start accepting NCS children. Over half responded outright saying there would be no support, and for the others, the support most frequently suggested was “the teachers will speak English a bit and use body language to help”.

5.6 Accessibility of school information by NCS parents

- 5.6.1 Only 31.7% kindergartens surveyed said they would provide notice in English for NCS parents. Approximately half said they would use other means to help parents to understand Chinese notices, such as teachers providing a verbal summary.
- 5.6.2 However, when it comes to the webpage information, over 70% kindergarten websites are inaccessible or not fully accessible to EM parents. It was found that 41.3% of the surveyed kindergartens provide website information ONLY in Chinese while, for another 30.2%, except for minimal admission information, essential information such

as school fee, school facilities, class structure, curriculum, etc. is largely unavailable in English. This places EM parents at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to making a school choice.

5.7 Factors affecting the kindergartens' attitudes and practices

5.7.1 Regarding kindergartens' attitudes, interview practices and school support, the chi-square test of independence showed no relationship with school fee level or whether it is a whole-day or half-day school.

5.7.2 However, whether the kindergarten currently has NCS students could be identified as a clear factor that may affect its attitudes, admission practices and support toward NCS applicants and students. There were significant differences between kindergartens having NCS students and those without in their willingness to accept applications from NCS children (80.4% vs 50.7%), adjusting the language of the admission interview (acceptance to conduct interview in English: 82.6% vs 63.2%) and providing relevant support to NCS students (in learning Chinese: 68.6% vs 39.1%) and parents (in notice language: 47% vs 8.7%).

5.8 Conclusion

5.8.1 As compared with the 2015 Unison survey, the resistance towards EM applicants appears to be less among kindergartens in general. This may be the outcome of a combination of factors, including the additional funding provided by EDB to kindergartens, strengthened guidelines and education to kindergarten administrators by the EDB and EOC, as well as continuous education and advocacy efforts from NGOs, such as HK Unison, Oxfam HK, etc.

5.8.2 A growing number of kindergartens are aware that they should not reject applications from NCS children and need to cater to their language needs. However, a considerable number, though not the majority, of kindergartens still rejected NCS applicants on the ground of Chinese language requirement, running the risk of indirect race discrimination.

- 5.8.3 Despite some improvements in kindergartens' attitudes, in actual practice, many of them were still unprepared to provide a welcoming language environment to facilitate EM applications. Many failed to make their school information accessible to NCS parents and some tended to give ambiguous or discouraging messages that could easily turn NCS applicants away. This echoed HK Unison's recent study¹⁴ that most Quality Assurance Reports on Kindergartens were only provided in Chinese, which deprived NCS parents of access to essential school information that was available to Chinese parents.
- 5.8.4 It was also found that kindergartens without experience of admitting NCS students were less willing to cater to the needs of NCS students while kindergartens with NCS students were more open to accepting and supporting NCS applicants. The current funding mechanism under the Free Kindergarten Quality Education Scheme that allows kindergartens admitting eight or more NCS students to receive an additional grant may encourage kindergartens with some NCS students to continue admitting more but may not be that appealing to kindergartens without any existing NCS students to admit the first one.

¹⁴ Hong Kong Unison Limited; Research on the Accountability of Kindergartens to the Ethnic Minority Community; November 2017.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, we make the following recommendations:

- 6.1** The 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.
- 6.2** 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.
- 6.3** In view that some kindergarten staff and administrators may not be aware of the implications of the language requirements under the Race Discrimination Ordinance, it is recommended that EDB arrange to provide further training in this area with the EOC and other NGOs.
- 6.4** 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.
- 6.5** 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 are put up in the school website for the information of NCS parents.

6.6 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.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

- 7.1** The study only covered kindergartens joining the Free Quality Kindergarten Education Scheme in 11 districts with higher South Asian population, out of a total of 18 districts in Hong Kong. Therefore, the study may not be representative of all kindergartens and non-South Asian NCS population living in Hong Kong.
- 7.2** The questionnaires were administered by the EOC staff posing as target parents. In the actual scenario, NCS parents might not be as articulate or insistent on getting information from the schools or might not be able to communicate with the respondents in English. Although, an NCS volunteer parent did cross-check the responses with a random selection of kindergartens within the sample, there may still be differences that are not reflected.
- 7.3** This survey was conducted over the telephone. There may be differences in response when parents actually visit the school and seek information in person.
- 7.4** Statistical test with significant result is unable to be conducted as the sample size is relatively small.

Annex 1

Kindergarten Admission Policy & Attitude for Non-Chinese Applicants

Questionnaire for Telephone Interview

A. Basic Information

Kindergarten:	
District:	
School Fee Range:	Low (Half Day) / Low (Full Day) / High / Medium
Telephone No.:	
Website:	
Interviewer:	
Ethnicity of the Child:	Indian / Nepalese / Pakistani

B. Interview Information

Details	First Interview	Second Interview
Date		
Start Time		
Finish Time		
Duration		
Gender of the Respondents	Male / Female	Male / Female

C. Case Scenario:

Ethnicity of the Family	Indian / Nepalese / Pakistani
Date of Birth	14 August 2015 (Aged 2 years & 2 months)
Parent's Request	Information for kindergarten admission
Parent's Language Proficiency	Speak English but cannot write, read and speak Chinese or Cantonese

D. Response Record

I. First Interview

No.	Questions*	Response (Direct Quote)
1.	My child is an Indian/Nepalese/Pakistani. Would you accept a non-Chinese speaking child? If no, why?	
2.	What language do you use for interview? If both English & Cantonese, skip no. 3-4.	
3.	Since my child does not speak Cantonese, would you interview him in English? If no, why?	
4.	For my child, could I bring along with a friend to interpret for us? If no, why?	
5.	Is Cantonese level a selection criterion for admission? If no, skip no. 6.	
6.	For my child, would you replace Cantonese level by alternative selection criteria? If yes, what criteria? If no, why?	
7.	What language will your school notices be written? If bilingual, then skip no.8.	
8.	As I do not speak or read Chinese, is there any way you can help me to understand the notices? If no, why?	
9.	Is there any non-Chinese student in your school at present? If no, ask question 10 directly. If yes, how many and what support will your school provide for them in learning Chinese? If no support, why?	
10.	(If there is no non-Chinese student in the school at present,) Will there be any support to help my child to learn Chinese? If yes, what type of support? If no, why?	
11.	Can I get further information of your school in English on your webpage or/and do you have English leaflet? If yes, skip no 12.	
12.	How can I get further information in English?	
13.	Who can I keep contact if I want more information?	
14.	Can I know how to address you and your position, so that I can contact you for further information?	

II. Second Interview (if applicable)

No.	Questions*	Response (Direct Quote)
1.	My child is an Indian/Nepalese/Pakistani. Would you accept a non-Chinese speaking child? If no, why?	
2.	What language do you use for interview? If both English & Cantonese, skip no. 3-4.	
3.	Since my child does not speak Cantonese, would you interview him in English? If no, why?	
4.	For my child, could I bring along with a friend to interpret for us? If no, why?	
5.	Is Cantonese level a selection criterion for admission? If no, skip no. 6.	
6.	For my child, would you replace Cantonese level by alternative selection criteria? If yes, what criteria? If no, why?	
7.	What language will your school notices be written? If bilingual, then skip no.8.	
8.	As I do not speak or read Chinese, is there any way you can help me to understand the notices? If no, why?	
9.	Is there any non-Chinese student in your school at present? If no, ask question 10 directly. If yes, how many and what support will your school provide for them in learning Chinese? If no support, why?	
10.	(If there is no non-Chinese student in the school at present,) Will there be any support to help my child to learn Chinese? If yes, what type of support? If no, why?	
11.	Can I get further information of your school in English on your webpage or/and do you have English leaflet? If yes, skip no 12.	
12.	How can I get further information in English?	
13.	Who can I keep contact if I want more information?	
14.	Can I know how to address you and your position, so that I can contact you for further information?	

E. Assessment on Respondents' Attitude

I. First Interview

No.	Questions*	Options** (1-10 Scale)									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Did the kindergarten staff provide you with the information that you needed?	Not at All	—————→							Completely	
2.	Was the kindergarten staff polite and helpful when dealing with your call?	Extremely Poor	—————→							Excellent	
3.	How would you rate the enquiry experience that you received overall?	Extremely Poor	—————→							Excellent	
4.	Do you feel you were given enough time to ask your questions?	Not at All	—————→							Completely Enough	
5.	Do you feel that the staff who answered your call understood your questions?	Not at All	—————→							Completely	

** Options: 1 = Not at All/Extremely Poor & 10 = Completely/Excellent/Completely Enough

II. Second Interview (If applicable)

No.	Questions*	Options** (1-10 Scale)									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Did the kindergarten staff provide you with the information that you needed?	Not at All	—————→							Completely	
2.	Was the kindergarten staff polite and helpful when dealing with your call?	Extremely Poor	—————→							Excellent	
3.	How would you rate the enquiry experience that you received overall?	Extremely Poor	—————→							Excellent	
4.	Do you feel you were given enough time to ask your questions?	Not at All	—————→							Completely Enough	
5.	Do you feel that the staff who answered your call understood your questions?	Not at All	—————→							Completely	

** Options: 1 = Not at All/Extremely Poor & 10 = Completely/Excellent/Completely Enough

F. Any Other Comments (Including direct quotes indicating respondents' attitude):

Annex 2

Kindergarten Admission Information for Non-Chinese Applicants

Questionnaire for Webpage Review

A. Basic Information

Kindergarten:	
District:	
School Fee Range:	Low (Half Day) / Low (Full Day) / High / Medium
Website:	
Reviewer	

B. Assessment on Accessibility of Webpage Information for Non-Chinese Parents

	Availability of/Accessibility for Information in English			
	Mostly/fully Available/ Accessible	Partially Available/ Accessible	Mostly Unavailable/ Inaccessible	Totally Unavailable/ Inaccessible
Portal page				
Keys for further sections				
Admission procedures				
Application form				
Selection criteria				
School basic information				
Support for NCS students				

C. Assessment Criteria

Rate	Criteria
Mostly Available/ Accessible	The website is fully bilingual.
Partially Available/ Accessible	Keys as well as some contents are in English including the application form, support to NCS parent/student, background information, school notices.
Mostly Unavailable/ Inaccessible	Only the keys are in English but not the content (menu heads/topics may be in English AND/OR application form only is bilingual/English).
Totally Unavailable/ Inaccessible	Everything is in Chinese only except perhaps the name of the school.

-End-