



Hong Kong Unison Limited
香港融樂會有限公司

For discussion on 28th April, 2015

Submission to the Subcommittee to Study the Implementation of Free Kindergarten Education on the Planning for the Provision of Kindergarten Places, in Particular Whole-day / Long Whole-day Kindergarten Places, and the Admission Arrangements for Kindergartens

In 2014/15, there are 11,933 K1 to K3 non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students in Hong Kong. According to the findings of a recent survey on kindergartens' support towards ethnic minority children, Hong Kong Unison believes there is indirect discrimination towards kindergarten admission.

Kindergarten is the first stage of education outside home. As the Education Bureau (EDB) always stresses, it is very conducive to integration if NCS students can start integration early. It is important that a fair and non-discriminatory kindergarten admission and allocation policy exists to enable equal learning opportunities for ethnic minority children.

Unison recently conducted a survey on "Kindergartens' Support and Attitude towards Ethnic Minority Students"¹ which involves the phone interviews of 239 kindergartens in 5 districts² in Hong Kong. Findings show that 137 (57%) kindergartens have not admitted non-Chinese speaking students; out of the 102 that have admitted NCS, 83 have few non-Chinese speaking students and the bulk of non-Chinese speaking students are concentrated in 19 schools.

There are a number of issues that deprive NCS students of an equal opportunity to be admitted into a kindergarten:

1. Most kindergartens require speaking of and comprehending Cantonese as an admission selection criterion

According to the survey, about 62% kindergartens use Cantonese as the interview language, totally disregarding the fact that not all local children speak Cantonese as their mother-tongue or home language. Kindergartens indirectly reject or dissuade non-Chinese speaking parents' applications when they or their child cannot speak or understand Cantonese. This prerequisite of speaking and understanding Cantonese is

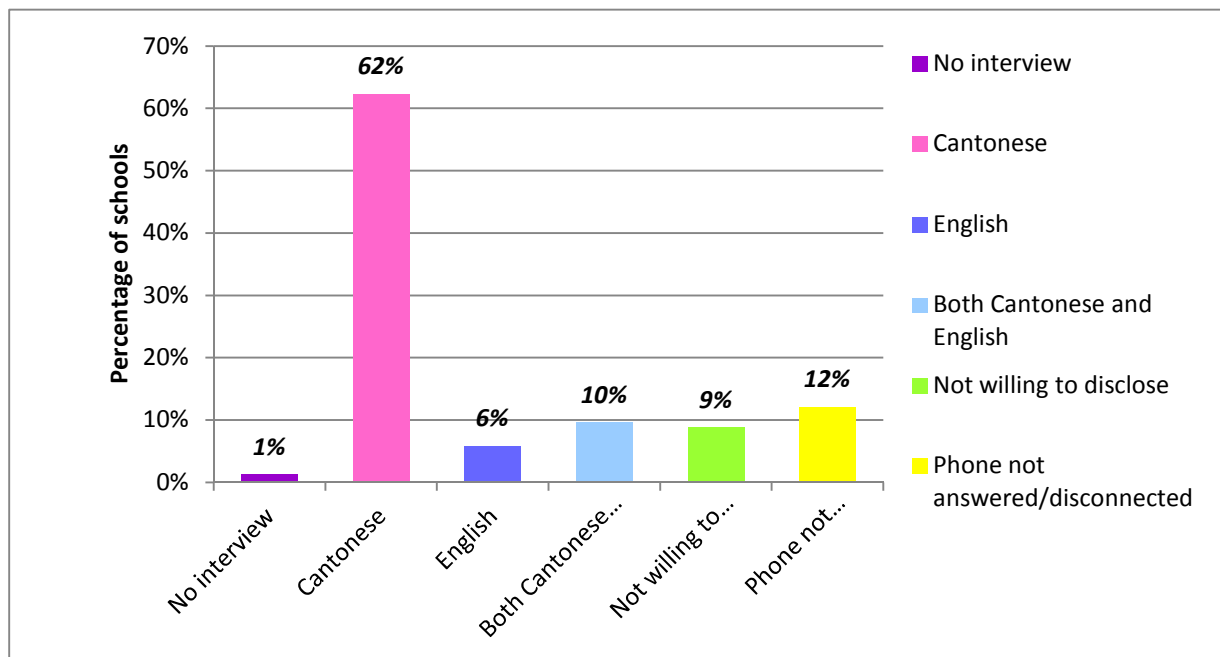
¹ The Survey will be published in mid-May 2015 and made available to public access at www.unison.org.hk.

² The Survey was conducted in 5 out of 18 districts of Hong Kong – Yau Tsim Mong, Yuen Long, Central and Western, Sham Shui Po, and North District



usually not explicit in the school's admission procedure or criteria. It is not possible to require ethnic minority children at the age of 2 to 3 whose mother tongue is not Chinese to use Chinese during a kindergarten interview. This actually constitutes indirect discrimination according to the Racial Discrimination Ordinance.

Table 1 - Language Used for Interview



According to the information given on the Briefing Sessions for KGs³ which are listed on the EDB website, kindergartens should adopt a 'fair, open and just manner' during the admission mechanism. However, currently there is no guideline or review mechanism to check whether they school are following this policy. Conducting an interview with a child who is 2 or 3 years old in Cantonese is simply not attainable, as commented by the parents who attended our focus group. All schools should follow the same process of elimination/selection for more transparency.

2. The lack of support to NCS children and parents limits choices for NCS families

Many ethnic minority parents express interest in placing their children into Chinese-medium kindergartens to immerse their children in a Chinese-language environment for early integration. However, parents are often met with uncooperative

3 Education Bureau Website – KGs briefing session:
[http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/kindergarten-k1-admission-arrangements/briefing%20session%20for%20kg_6.5%20\(TC\).pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/edu-system/preprimary-kindergarten/kindergarten-k1-admission-arrangements/briefing%20session%20for%20kg_6.5%20(TC).pdf)

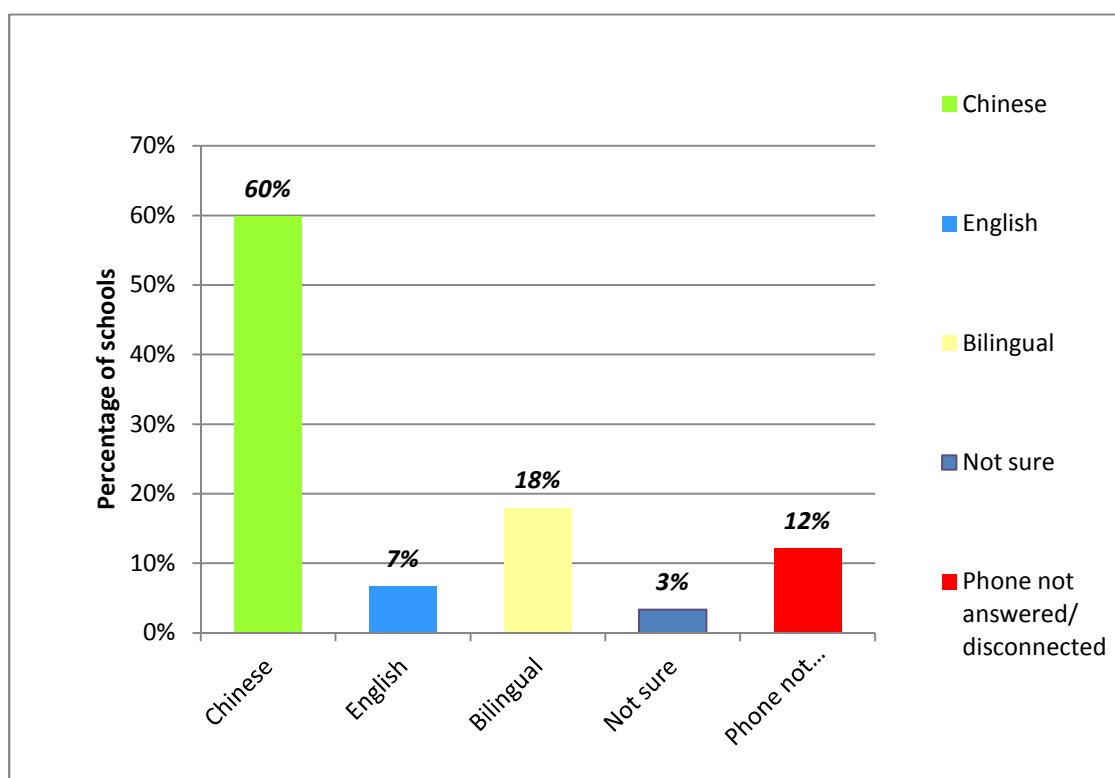


or unwelcoming attitudes when they inquire with kindergartens about the support to NCS children and parents, and because of that, do not feel comfortable placing their children in these kindergartens.

Kindergartens generally lack support for NCS schoolchildren. Among those kindergartens in all 5 districts we called, 64% of the kindergartens said that they do not provide their ethnic minority students with additional Chinese learning support. A mere 13% kindergarten said that they provide supplementary support.

In addition, NCS parents find it difficult to communicate with kindergartens. Our survey reveals that around 60% of the kindergartens say they will only provide written notices in Chinese. Out of these kindergartens, only 21% said they will offer verbal translations to non-Chinese speaking parents.

Table 3 - Language Used for School Notices



Furthermore, low-income families are less likely to have access to English or bilingual school notices. Kindergartens that joined the pre-Primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS) are less likely to use English or bilingual notices. Among the 170



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kindergartens in our survey that joined the PEVS, only 8% provides bilingual notices, compared to 43% of non-PEVS kindergartens.

We request the EDB to give information on:

- How the EDB ensures that school-based admission procedures and criteria can provide fair opportunities for applicants regardless of the applicant's sex, race, disabilities or language background;
- What measures the EDB will take to eliminate *de facto* racial segregation in kindergartens; and
- How the EDB will enhance support to NCS students and parents in kindergartens to promote early integration and help NCS children learn Chinese.

Hong Kong Unison Recommendations:

- The EDB should provide more stringent oversight over kindergartens to review their admission criteria especially on the language requirement for the admission of children, i.e. kindergartens should not only use Chinese as the interview language taking into account background of ethnic minority children.
- Kindergarten should inform the parents about the admission criteria and procedure clearly during the application stage. Such criteria and procedure should be made known to the applicants in writing. These materials should be in English.
- The EDB should provide the printed version of "Kindergarten Profiles" in English for NCS parents to facilitate an informed choice of kindergarten. The information provided in English should be the same as Chinese. The same information should be posted on their website.

Entry into kindergarten is key to facilitating access to future learning opportunities and for effective integration into the mainstream learning framework. Therefore, any barriers based on race or language must be immediately addressed.