

# Lack of staff plagues city preschools [VN] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Staff shortages in HCM City's preschools have reached crisis point as student numbers continue to soar, according to Nguyen Thi Kim Thanh, Head of Preschool Education Bureau under the city's Department of Education and Training.

Heavy workloads and low pay were the main reasons preschool teaching was an unpopular job, Thanh said. "A preschool teacher can only expect to earn from VND1 million (US\$62.5) to VND1.5 million (\$93.75), which is not enough, especially when the cost of living is getting higher."

The job was also extremely stressful, Thanh said. "Teachers are expected to be in charge of over 20 children and work from 10-12 hours per day."

Under current regulations, classes with more than 20 infants must have two teachers. "At the moment there are only 11,537 teachers, not enough to have two teachers per class," he said.

At present, the city has 639 kindergartens, 385 of which are public and 254 private and 815 individual classes with more than 250,000 children, according to HCM City's Department of Education and Training. And figures are set to rise, as the number of under two-year-olds going to school in the city is predicted to increase by 4,000 per year.

In contrast to demand, the economic hub only has three preschool teacher training centres. For the 2007-2008 year, the centres supplied a mere 1,000 extra teachers; 370 from the Central Teachers' Training school No 3; 500 from the Pre-school Department of Sai Gon University and 100 from HCM City's Teachers' Training College

"The graduation rate only meets about 60-70 per cent of demand at public schools," Thanh said.

## Going private

To fill the gap, private pre-schools and home care services are mushrooming across the city. This is helping to ease the pressure on public establishments, said Le Thi Hong Lien, Deputy Director of HCM City's Department of Education and Training. "Private schools are also creating jobs and appeal to different kinds of customers."

With low fees, ranging from VND200,000 (\$12.5) to VND500,000 (\$31.25) per month, private child care services are particularly popular with low-income parents.

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But to provide cheaper services, private schools cut corners by hiring unqualified or temporary staff. Some even lack baby-care facilities, teaching equipment, are cramped and don't meet hygiene standards.

Out of 35 child-care centres inspected by District 9's People's Committee this year, eight failed hygiene standards. Similar inspections in Go Vap District revealed 13 units had out-of-date working permits.

These centres supplied 40 per cent of childcare facilities in the city.

## Right the wrong

According to preschool bureau chief Thanh, every ward and commune should have a public preschool.

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The State should also encourage high-quality private centres by easing administrative procedures. "One private kindergarten owner at Go Vap District can't expand the centre because of complicated procedure," head of the district's Education Bureau Le Thi Tai said.

Another hurdle was land rental, said former director of Education and Training Department Ho Thieu Hung. "The preschool sector is not very lucrative so kindergartens should get priority on renting land," he said.

To solve the problem, the Government should give private schools VND500,000 (\$31.25) for each child per year so the centres can

improve infrastructure and increase teachers' salaries.

The city's Department of Education and Training has asked district education departments to help private schools and boost the number of trained preschool teachers entering the workforce every year.

All private schools will be fined from VND500,000 (\$31.25) to VND1 million (\$62.5) for one violation of current regulations and will be forced to close if the violation is serious.

- reprinted from Viet Nam News

**Region:** Asia <sup>[2]</sup>

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