

Children cry out for better nurseries [VN]^[1]

Vietnam Net Bridge

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EXCERPTS

Ho Chi Minh City seriously lacks public nurseries and abounds in private ones which more often than not are simply upgraded homes offering poor services.

According the local Department of Education and Training, the city presently has 267 private nurseries and 735 childcare places tending to over 100,000 kids.

Statistics show that more and more kids are attending private preschools, which should be encouraging news if their quality is reliable enough. But alas...

Many nurseries or childcare facilities, especially in suburban districts, have been upgraded from private homes and residences, thus, ventilation systems, playgrounds for kids are almost non-existent. Others do not hire trained teachers.

Since most parents in outer city are low-incomers, they can only afford low-tuition nurseries that charge as low as VND120,000 (US\$7.5) a month. To gain profits, these 'institutions' have no alternative but to hire untrained and few teachers, explained Ms. Le Thi Hong Lien, Deputy Director of the HCMC Education Department.

As a result, many nursery classes are taken care of by one teacher and one nanny only instead of two teachers and two nannies as regulated.

Many also cut down on daily food rations for kids, added Ms. Lien.

Meanwhile, public nursery schools charge higher & around VND450,000 - VND500,000 - a month but their quality are ensured. Still, there are some international-standard private nurseries or semi-private ones charging hefty fees and admitting only children from well-off families.

Then, a government decision complicates the problem.

Though decent nursery schools are in increasing demand, in the past few years, no more public ones have been built in the city subject to a Prime Ministerial decision stipulating that public nurseries are only permitted in poor and remote areas.

"I think the government should allow us to build more public preschools, two in each ward at least, to create condition for children of low-income people to enjoy decent education", voiced Ms. Tran Thi Tri, Deputy Head of the Tan Phu District Education Office.

In short supply

Of eleven wards in Tan Phu District, only eight have public nurseries whereas the number of preschool children in the district on average increases by over 1,000 yearly. At present, classes at public nurseries are overloaded with between 50 children 60 each.

Binh Tan District suffers the same fate. Only eleven out of 80 nurseries are public ones. Children in districts Binh Hung Hoa A and Binh Hung Hoa B have to share a public nursery school. In Hoc Mon District, there are only 16 public nurseries but 50 private ones and childcare places where up to 70 children are stuffed into one class.

At present, there are ten wards throughout the city that do not even have a public nursery school.

Coupled with this problem are government-stipulated catchment areas that dictate which families are entitled to which public schools.

Hence, certain families can not send their children to nearby public nurseries and have to resort to private ones that in some cases not only charge higher but are of inferior quality.

Recently, a caretaker at a private nursery was arrested for sealing an 18-month-old infant's mouth with a duct tape to stop her from crying, leaving her dead days later. Another was found whipping some children while feeding them, both igniting a public outcry over private preschools and their conditions.

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