

Email Newsletter from Mayor of Okayama City (73) September 30th, 2016 Issue

【Challenges to eliminate children on waiting lists for nursery schools】

Hello, I'm Mr. Omori, Mayor of Okayama.

In May 2016, City of Okayama announced that the number of the children on waiting lists for nursery schools had reached a record high of 729 (as of 1 April 2016).

This is because of the reexamination on the definition of “children on waiting lists for nursery schools” to include a number of those who were not able to enter nursery schools despite of parents’ efforts on adjusting their first to third choices in applications. However the result was the dishonorable second worst in Japan.

This reexamination made everyone aware that the definition of “children on waiting lists” was vague and largely left to local governments’ discretion. And I heard the nation started to examine the way to unify the definition.

In such situation, I was invited to the meeting regarding children on waiting lists for nursery schools (held on 27 September), which I was not able to make it. However on the same day, I got the opportunity to explain Okayama city’s policy regarding these children to the executives of Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.

Through various discussions with them, there were two points I wanted to inform.

Firstly, inadequate improvement in the environment for raising children resulted from the fact that the number of children on waiting lists had been regarded as zero since 2003 until 2014 in Okayama city.

Background of sharing a number of these children is to set a target to solve as the government. However once these numbers are interpreted arbitrarily, it could lead to a delay in enhancing children's raising environment. Thus I requested them to take this into consideration well when the definition is examined.

The other point is that an improvement in social scheme or changes in working style are of course required but the biggest challenge for us would be obtaining enough number of nursery teachers while Okayama city is now working hard to secure them for 800 children.

Approximately 2,100 nursery teachers are working in Okayama city. The estimation shows that 120 of them are required for the children on waiting lists and another 210 is needed for all children not accepted by nursery schools.

But what I heard is that nursery teachers are relocating to Tokyo area from Okayama. This movement may be accelerated if the gap of their working condition continues to expand because of the difference of fiscal space in each government.

With regards to this as well, I suggested to the executives to consider policies such as securing more numbers of nursery teachers for children who are waiting to enter nursery schools with the view point to put the larger value on areas which have less fiscal space and are suffered more from this matter.

I don't think the second point is easy to solve. But it was totally meaningful to help the nation understand the actual condition under Okayama and other local cities.

Okayama city will continue to work on the nation like this case and also will do our best to improve the environment for raising children. We would highly appreciate citizens' kind understanding.