

【Bright Signs to Eliminate the Waiting List for Nursery Schools!】

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

On the other day, we announced that the number of children on the waiting list for nursery schools and certified *Kodomo-en* (childcare center) was 551 as of 1 April this year (Decreased by 298 from the last year).

It is needless to say the fact that 551 children are waiting is still a big problem so further effort is required. However, what I would like to tell you this time is that we are finally seeing the “bright sings” in order to eliminate the waiting list for nursery schools by the end of FY 2019.

Main reasons are as follows;

- The number of applications for admission increased by about 800 per year on average for the past two years in a row, but it has been settled down to 376. This is because of the weakening of the influence from the abolition of the system that required children to leave childcare facilities if their parents were on parental leave.
- We are making steady progress in preparing childcare arrangements including non-registered childcare facilities with a certain quality (It was for additional 1,780 children in the last fiscal year).

The City of Okayama has been shifting to the “close support” style from somewhat passive attitude by contacting those who need help, giving counsel and introducing childcare facilities that seem to be available for them. But this has not become

widespread yet as it was discovered that the availability for about 600 children was unused.

In order to resolve such a mismatch, currently 10 *Hoiku* Concierges (support staff for childcare users) are trying hard to provide good matching, and more than 100 children entered childcare facilities in this April alone.

We continue to promote *Hoiku* Concierge's close support and flexible acceptance during this fiscal year. Already having seen a prospect of securing childcare arrangements for more than 1,000 children for next April, we would like many guardians to utilize it.

However, even though we started to see such bright signs, it is still unknown how the impact of the nation's ongoing measure of free childcare and infant education will be like. And the shortage of childcare staff remains as a big issue.

The City of Okayama will sincerely face with each family's needs and circumstances and will do our utmost to solve the guardians' immediate problem as soon as possible. So, please do not hesitate to consult *Hoiku* Concierges.

If you know someone who needs advice about childcare, please encourage them to contact the following;

***Contact of *Hoiku* Concierges;**

Kindergarten's Educational Management Division: 086-803-1431

Kita Ward Chuo Welfare Office: 086-803-1209

Kita Ward Kita Welfare Office: 086-251-6530

Naka Ward Welfare Office: 086-901-1231

Higashi Ward Welfare Office: 086-944-1822

Minami Ward Nishi Welfare Office: 086-281-9620

Minami Ward Minami Welfare Office: 086-230-0321