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Minority preschool pupils 'held back' by funding shortfall

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A lack of government funding is limiting the ability of local kindergardens to train ethnic minority children in Chinese and other studies, according to a large majority of the schools who responded to a recent survey.

Seventy per cent of the 102 preschools polled said their pupils had “significantly varying” levels of Chinese proficiency, yet just over one-third of them had the resources they required to deal with such needs.

The survey was released on Wednesday by Hong Kong Unison, a lobby group for ethnic minorities' rights. About 1,200 ethnic minority schoolchildren attend 71 of the preschools, and Pakistanis are the biggest single ethnic minority population among them.

The lack of teaching resources will leave the youngsters less equipped to integrate into mainstream Hong Kong society, according to the group. “Hong Kong Unison urges the Education Bureau to allow and subsidise pre-primary teachers to enrol in these training programmes, or provide similar training for them,” the report said.

Almost 60 per cent of teachers had encountered language barriers with pupils' parents and 56 per cent with the children. Only 7 per cent said they faced no difficulties at all.

As many as 90 per cent of the schools said government support was “insufficient”, and 80 per cent said they wanted more funding to hire teachers or teaching assistants from minority groups.

Only 2 per cent of teachers at the preschools had received government-arranged training on cultural sensitivity for dealing with children from minority groups.

“Early childhood education programmes offered by [the] Hong Kong Institute of Education and Vocational Training Council should admit more ethnic minority students,” Unison's report said.