

Iizuna Gakuen Green Hills Elementary School, Grades 5 & 6 (Nagano city)

What Is “Normal” – Questioning Assumptions to Learn About Rights and Equality

Fifth- and sixth-grade students at Iizuna Gakuen Green Hills Elementary School explored the theme: “Equal access to opportunity brings richness to humanity.” Through this lens, they tackled questions about rights, discrimination, and social norms.

Starting with Children’s Rights

The project began with a study of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Students selected three rights to focus on: freedom from discrimination, the right to express opinions, and the right to rest. They created a class charter called “Forest of Bonds.” However, they began to question whether their promises were truly meaningful, leading them to a deeper exploration of rights and responsibilities.

Expanding the Concept of “Normal”

By reading newspaper articles, students learned about people whose rights are often limited, such as persons with disabilities, women, and foreign workers in Japan. They began to realize that what feels normal to them might not be so for others. The idea of “questioning the norm” became a key theme in their inquiry.

Learning from Para-Athletes

As a sports-loving class, the students each researched a para-athlete preparing for the Paris Paralympics. They wrote articles and even sent letters – receiving responses from three athletes, including blind soccer player Taichi Hirabayashi, whom they later met in person. This encounter allowed students to better understand life with a disability and reflect on their own privileges.

Delving into Gender and Equality

Toward the end of the year, students noticed more articles using terms like “gender” and “equality.” They explored related topics, such as same-sex marriage, different surnames for married couples, and the gender imbalance in sports broadcasting.

This led to a classroom-wide discussion: “What is marriage, really?” Their critical thinking skills deepened as they examined society’s assumptions.

Toward a More Just Future

Throughout the year, students learned that questioning what is taken for granted can lead to greater understanding of others and of social systems. They plan to continue thinking critically about their world and taking action toward a more inclusive society.