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My First Skool at Block 997 Buangkok Crescent (left and left below) partners the National Gallery Singapore to offer visual arts learning experiences to the children at its centre. ST PHOTO: ONG WEE JIN

portunity to say something and we respect what they say.”

While the programme was initially meant for pre-schoolers, who learn about art elements and techniques, Ms Tan extended it to infants too. Babies and toddlers can explore what is called “mark making” using crayons and paints, as well as discover colours and textures.

Their weekly dose of art can sometimes be as simple as stepping on or touching a “Christmas tree” painting taped securely to the floor, which The Straits Times saw during its visit to the centre. The painting had a layer of bubble wrap on it for sensory stimulation and educators talked to the tots about the colours green and red.

Ms Tan says when infants engage in making art using child-friendly materials, “we encourage them, ‘I see that you’re using red all over the picture. Do you like red?’”

“They cannot express themselves (yet), but if they can stay engaged in the activity for a longer period of time, we know that they’re interested and we can continue to build on this interest.”

The pre-school chain offers infant care at 117 of its 145 centres, with more slated to open next year. Fees for Singaporean babies are about \$1,365 a month before subsidies.

Besides respecting children’s interests, MFS’ relationship-based curriculum seeks to create a safe and nurturing environment for the young ones to thrive. Each child is assigned a primary caregiver.

“We have a consistent caregiver to build the attachment because, for very young children, the attachment is important to help them to build on their learning,” Ms Tan says.

The pre-school chain also works closely with parents to equip them with the skills they need to support their babies’ development at home.

The Buangkok Crescent centre, for instance, holds online workshops in which parents can create musical instruments from recycled materials and learn how to choose books for infants. They also take home craft and sensorial activities each term.

Stephanie Yeo

Using art to help babies develop language skills

At first glance, My First Skool (MFS) at Block 997 Buangkok Crescent looks like most other infant-care centres.

There is a wide range of activities around the perimeter of the main space, leaving plenty of room in the centre for little ones to crawl, cruise and walk freely under supervision. Younger babies have their own dedicated area.

But visitors who look closely will spy a mini art gallery along a corri-

dor space that is lined with bold splatter paintings on canvas as well as other colourful works.

Thanks to a partnership with the National Gallery Singapore, the centre has been introducing visual arts learning experiences to its children since it opened in 2018, says executive principal Pearlyn Tan. It is one of 17 MFS centres offering a deeper dive into the practice than the typical curriculum offers.

The centre caters to many low-

income families in the area, and art is a tool that helps them develop expressive language, which they may not have opportunities to hone at home.

“When we first observed the children, they were always waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do,” she says. “Through art, they’re free to explore. Teachers will ask, ‘Can you share with me what you have drawn? Why do you want to do it this way?’. They have an op-

