

More slots for specialised support programme in pre-schools

Amelia Teng
Education Correspondent

A programme that provides specialised support for children with developmental needs in pre-schools will offer more spots.

There will be 100 places created over the next three years under the Inclusive Support Programme launched last year, said Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling yesterday.

Currently, 38 children from seven pre-schools are enrolled in the programme by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA).

The programme caters to children with developmental needs, aged three to six, who require medium levels of early intervention support, and integrates their education and early intervention in a pre-school setting.

Ms Sun, who was visiting a My First Skool (MFS) centre at Blk 406 Woodlands, which is under the scheme, said: "Adjustments were made to the infrastructure, for instance, to the tables and chairs, which will better enable our children with developmental needs to learn alongside typically developing peers in the classroom."

Teachers also make use of tools and guides to enable the children to follow instructions step by step and learn effectively, she said.

At the MFS pre-school run by NTUC First Campus (NFC), modifications have been made to accommodate children with needs such as autism and speech delay.

Ms Deniece Bidhiya, senior manager in NFC's child support services department, said low ceiling boards were installed in its two centres offering the inclusive programme. Besides reducing noise levels, this helps teachers manage their classes better, she said.

An early intervention corner was



also set up in each of the centres for therapists to have one-to-one sessions with the children, along with visual markers to help them follow instructions, she added.

Since February, NFC has had 11 children with developmental needs across two of its pre-schools – at Block 406 Woodlands Street 41 and Block 248 Kim Keat Link. It plans to take in at least five more children in the second half of the year.

ECDA yesterday also launched a guide for parents and caregivers of young children up to six years old with developmental needs.

The guide was jointly developed with the Ministry of Education, KK Women's and Children's Hospital, National University Hospital and other partners. Ms Sun said it outlined some of the challenges parents may face, and help channels they could turn to, and gave information

on milestones like enrolling for primary or special education schools.

Madam Nur Sa'adah Mohammad Razif, 38, whose six-year-old son Fahmi has speech delay and is attending the MFS centre in Woodlands, said he had improved and could speak in full sentences. Before Fahmi joined the inclusive programme, a bus took him from the pre-school to a different centre three times a week. "It was disrupt-

ive as he missed lessons in the pre-school and the travelling also tired him," said Madam Sa'adah, who works in the tech industry.

Real estate consultant Andrew Yap, 49, transferred his five-year-old son Jia Kai, who has global development delay, from another MFS centre to the Block 406 Woodlands centre after hearing about the inclusive programme.

"He had lost interest in school be-

cause he couldn't keep up with the other kids and couldn't understand his teachers," said Mr Yap.

"But now he has grown in confidence, and he enjoys time with his friends and learning with them. He can also speak in complete sentences. We hope that he can go to mainstream primary school, to be as normal as other kids."

ateng@sph.com.sg

Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling (far left) observing a lesson by early interventionist Rachel Lim at My First Skool at Woodlands Block 406 yesterday. With them are K2 pupils (from left) Yap Jia Kai and Ahmad Hayyan, both five.
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