

More lower-income kids attending pre-school regularly after NTUC First Campus pilot

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Attendance rates among pre-schoolers from low-income households at My First Skool centres have improved within a year of a new intervention programme.

Between July 2024 and April 2025, attendance of nursery and kindergarten children from these families rose from around 72 per cent to 77 per cent, following a pilot programme by NTUC First Campus, which operates 162 My First Skool centres across Singapore.

Launched in July 2024, the programme supports disadvantaged families in addressing challenges that hinder regular pre-school attendance. It has so far helped 930 children across eight centres, chosen for their higher proportion of pupils from lower-income backgrounds. This refers to those from families with a household income of less than \$6,000.

The pilot, which is supported by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA), will run until 2027, and aims to reach out to at least 700 more children in 2025.

Nationally, pre-school attendance among children from such households is lower than that of their peers from other income groups.

Children from lower-income families enrolled in anchor operator pre-schools – which receive government funding for keeping their fees affordable – have a monthly attendance rate of about 72 per cent, Minister for Social and Family Development Masagos Zulkifli had said in Parliament in March 2024. This is lower than the 79 per cent attendance rate of their middle-income peers.

At My First Skool, children who

are not in the low-income category have an average attendance rate of 85 per cent to 90 per cent.

The ECDA extended more funding to selected pre-schools in 2024 to raise attendance rates among disadvantaged children.

About 2,000 children are expected to benefit from the additional resources, Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling said in an update on April 4.

As at January 2025, 27 anchor-operated centres offer enhanced support focusing on pre-school attendance and learning, she said.

The work involves family support staff from the pre-schools identifying parents who are from lower-income backgrounds and taking note of children who do not attend school regularly.

Staff then follow up with these families to find out the different issues they may face, and refer them to social service agencies and other initiatives for help.

Ms Sun said: “These parents of lower-income families tend to face many pressing challenges. For instance, they may not have stable jobs, they may be spending a lot of time looking for jobs. They may be working irregular hours, which makes sending the children to school a bit more difficult.

“They also may be struggling with housing and medical issues, and all these are complex issues that these lower-income families face.”

The Government remains committed to ensuring that pre-school remains accessible and affordable, she said, noting the enhanced subsidies for school fees that mean some families can pay as little as \$3 a month.

Ms Sun was attending the launch of a book by NTUC First Campus on April 4 at a My First

Skool pre-school in Yishun. Titled *Little Chick Goes To School Too*, the book details school from a child’s point of view in simple English.

The books will be given to lower-income families at the eight centres that are part of the pilot.

NTUC First Campus’ senior manager for learning support Rita Lim said that in using simple English for the book, the objective is to reach out to parents who may not be as fluent in the language, as well as allow children to understand it.

“As the story is from a child’s point of view, parents will be happy to listen to what the children have to say, and it will hopefully promote conversations. We want the parents to see school from our eyes and see that it is fun.”

Five-year-old Nur Quraisha Misngat used to attend pre-school just once or twice a month.

After a family support executive from My First Skool visited her home and convinced her to try out all the fun activities in pre-school, she now goes to school every day.

Her mother, Madam Nur’Ain Osman, previously had trouble convincing the girl to go to school.

Due to a stressful family situation and having to take care of her three other children, she often gave in to her daughter’s requests to stay home.

The 38-year-old, who sells products online, said: “(The staff) also spoke to me to find out about the challenges I face. They didn’t pressure me in any way to quickly force her to go to school; they encouraged me and supported me step by step instead.

“Now, seeing how much she has improved in reading and speaking makes me so happy.”

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Between July 2024 and April 2025, attendance of nursery and kindergarten children from low-income families rose to 77 per cent from around 72 per cent, following the pilot programme by NTUC First Campus. ST PHOTO: BRIAN TEO