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# Pre-school brands go into after-school care

Big names like Julia Gabriel and NTUC First Campus say expanding their services allows them to support families beyond pre-school



**Elisa Chia**  
Correspondent

For years, parents have trusted them with their toddlers. Now, more and more of Singapore's biggest early childhood brands are growing up alongside their little alumni, expanding into after-school care for primary school pupils.

Student care centres offer safe,

supervised environments and meals for children outside school hours while their parents work.

As at June, 330 centres were registered with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). Of these, 55 per cent operate inside primary schools, serving only their own pupils, while 45 per cent are based in the community, welcoming children aged seven to 14 from the wider neighbourhood.

However, the actual market size is larger. Registration with MSF is mandatory only for community-based centres that offer the Government's Student Care Fee Assistance scheme for lower-in-

come families.

As the ministry does not track unregistered private providers, official figures exclude a new wave of after-school centres recently rolled out by pre-school giants, including household names behind Julia Gabriel Preschool and EtonHouse Pre-School.

MindChamps Group, which established MindChamps Pre-School in 2008, was a pioneer in this space. The group launched its MindSpace after-school centres in January 2022 and is set to open its 27th branch in September.

Other major operators have since jumped into the fray. NTUC First Campus, a stalwart of the lo-

cal early childhood scene since 1977, launched Changemakers Afterschool in Marine Parade in January 2025.

"After-school care is a natural extension," says Eleanor Tan, chief growth officer at NTUC First Campus. "It allows us to support families beyond the pre-school years as children transition into primary school."

Echoing this sentiment is MapleBear Singapore chief executive Patricia Koh, who introduced the MapleBear Junior Club after-school programme in January.

"Over the years, many parents have asked us the same question: 'What comes next?'" she says.

"They wanted their children to continue learning in an environment where they already felt safe, understood and inspired."

However, these centres come with premium fees.

Among the facilities that The Straits Times visited, fees start at \$900 a month. In comparison, the median monthly fee for student care centres registered with MSF is \$290, with the majority charging between \$220 and \$450.

One major reason for the pricing is their specialised academic offerings, which save families the hassle of sending children to separate tuition centres.

Parent Beatrice Liu, 42, appre-

ciates the holistic approach for her seven-year-old son, Liam Cheng, who joined Thrive After-school by Julia Gabriel in January. "The programme fees, while not low, provide good value," says Liu, the co-founder of a modern TCM clinic.

"There is a different enrichment class every afternoon, yet the children stay in one consistent environment where they can build a social network."

Here is a look at how four familiar brands are building on their pre-school expertise to suit primary school children.

CONTINUED on C2

**CHANGEMAKERS AFTERSCHOOL BY NTUC FIRST CAMPUS**



At student care centre Changemakers, run by NTUC First Campus, Primary 1 pupils take part in activities such as financial literacy sessions. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

**Where:** 22-08 Parkway Parade, 80 Marine Parade Road  
**Info:** [changemakers.edu.sg/afterschool](http://changemakers.edu.sg/afterschool)

Primary 3 pupil Jared Chen queues for his turn at the Gotcha-pon machine, a cardboard prototype his class made during a previous lesson. Inspired by Japanese gashapon vending machines, it dispenses a capsule containing a handwritten note: "Smile, and the world will smile back."

Jared grins, running off to join his friends who are busy assembling a cardboard foosball table. This hands-on session is part of the Young Innovators curriculum at Changemakers Afterschool.

Located on the top storey of Parkway Parade, the centre offers panoramic views of the sea and

the city skyline stretching as far as Marina Bay Sands. The facility opened in January 2025 and currently cares for children mostly in Primary 1 to 3.

For about three hours a week, pupils engage in project-based tasks designed to spark creativity, critical thinking and teamwork.

"The Primary 1 and 2 years are a particularly important window," says Eleanor Tan, chief growth officer at NTUC First Campus, which operates three pre-school brands, My First Skool, Little Skool-House and Changemakers Explorer. "As formal academic demands are still relatively manageable, we use this period to help children build strong foundations in life skills such as independence and emotional regulation. This

prepares them to cope with increased academic expectations from Primary 3 onwards."

The group's sole student care centre is managed by former secondary school teacher Theresa Wong, who also designs and teaches the English enrichment curriculum. Such optional academic programmes save children the hassle of travelling to multiple tuition centres after school.

NTUC First Campus aims to open more such centres across the island over the next few years. Monthly fees are \$900 before GST for the standard five-day programme. Add-on academic enrichment costs \$200 a subject monthly, while a three-subject bundle is priced from \$1,400 a month.

**BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS**

**As formal academic demands are still relatively manageable, we use this period to help children build strong foundations in life skills such as independence and emotional regulation.**



**ELEANOR TAN**, chief growth officer at NTUC First Campus.

**ELEVATE AFTER SCHOOL CARE BY ETONHOUSE**



Pupils enjoying a fine-dining-style lunch designed to teach table manners. ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

**Where:** Four locations, including 02-02 Sengkang Grand Mall, 70 Compassvale Bow

**Info:** [theetonacademy.com.sg/after-school-care](http://theetonacademy.com.sg/after-school-care)  
"Ten out of 10," a group of Primary 1 and 2 children chime enthusiastically when asked to rate their lunch. Today, they are enjoying a fine-dining-style meal designed to teach table manners at Elevate After School Care by EtonHouse.

Their lunch is served on porcelain plates, featuring a low-salt, low-sugar menu of roasted herb fish, spaghetti with red pepper stew, parsley potatoes and fresh vegetables. Prepared by executive chef Kevin Cha and his team, the meal becomes an interactive lesson.

Familiar with the habits of picky eaters, Cha encourages the children to try everything on their plates. Senior teaching specialist Jessica Pinel, who also teaches the English enrichment classes, guides them on how to twirl their spaghetti with a fork.

While this formal dining experience takes place once every three months, wholesome lunches are a weekday staple, prepared at EtonHouse's central kitchens and served in bento boxes.

Founded in 1995, EtonHouse International Education Group – which runs EtonHouse Pre-School and E-Bridge Pre-School – launched its student care venture in January 2025. ST visited its first centre at Sengkang Grand Mall, an integrated hub above Buangkok MRT station.

The dining etiquette lessons are part of the centre's food and nutrition curriculum, which complements its core academic offerings.

Pupils receive homework support and English and maths tuition, with the option to add Chinese classes. These lessons are delivered by educators from The Eton Academy, the group's tuition and enrichment arm.

"Our academic programme is aligned with the school syllabus and delivered through an inquiry-led approach, so pupils are encouraged to participate actively rather than learn by rote," says Ryan Woo, deputy director of enrichment.

The brand currently runs four student care centres, with a fifth location slated to open in 2027. The current cohort comprises Primary 1 and 2 pupils. Monthly fees are priced at \$1,200 before GST, which includes weekly English and maths tuition alongside enrichment experiences such as public speaking.



# Supportive environment eases transition into school

## MAPLEBEAR JUNIOR CLUB BY MAPLEBEAR SINGAPORE

Primary 1 pupils Jayne Low (right) and Mikaela Xie (far right), both seven, colouring 3D-printed figures at the MapleBear Junior Club Thomson Campus. ST PHOTO: SARAH LEE



### FROM C1

**Where:** Six locations, including BI-05 EBC Lifestyle Hub, 50 Tagore Lane  
**Info:** maplebearjc.sg  
Primary 1 pupils Jayne Low and Mikaela Xie sit transfixed in front of two 3-D printers, watching them churn out small plastic animal figurines. The machines, alongside high-tech tools like robotic balls, support the Futuristic Edutainment programme at MapleBear Junior Club's Thomson campus.  
Both girls are alumni of MapleBear Preschool. The new student care centre offers a familiar environment that helps ease their transition into primary

school.  
MapleBear, a Canadian education company founded in 2005, now operates more than 500 schools across 40 countries. Education veteran Patricia Koh, who brought the MapleBear brand to Singapore in 2013, is taking a different approach to staffing the new student care venture.  
Rather than relying solely on traditional primary school teachers, the chief executive is developing a team that combines experienced early childhood educators with specialists from various professional fields.  
Pre-school educators with the right passion and aptitude undergo additional training to sup-

port the older children, preserving the warm, nurturing environment the brand takes pride in.  
Specialist programmes such as robotics are led by professionals, many of whom hold postgraduate qualifications in their respective fields, says Koh.  
The hands-on learning extends from future-focused fields to traditional arts. During an Architecture and Experience Art session, children work alongside friends, shaping clay into tealight holders under a teacher's guidance.  
These enrichment offerings are designed to broaden children's learning rather than prepare them for exams. "While it

may reduce the need for additional weekend enrichment classes, our primary goal is not convenience," she adds. "It is to provide children with opportunities to discover new interests within a supportive environment."  
The majority of pupils are currently in Primary 1 to 3. Facilitators guide them through their schoolwork, helping them develop good study habits before they move on to hands-on projects and outdoor play.  
Families enrolling by Dec 31 enjoy a promotional monthly fee for a year: \$800 before GST for MapleBear alumni and \$1,000 for those new to the group. The usual rate is \$1,500.

## THRIVE AFTER-SCHOOL BY JULIA GABRIEL



Creative writing is one of the enrichment programmes at Thrive After-school at New Bahru. ST PHOTO: JASON QUAH

**Where:** Four locations, including 04-10 New Bahru, School Block, 46 Kim Yam Road  
**Info:** thrive.juliagabriel.com  
Levine Huang, a Primary 1 pupil, looks forward to her afternoons at Thrive After-school by Julia Gabriel at New Bahru.  
For the Julia Gabriel Preschool attendee, the centre offers a sense of continuity. "It's fun here and I have many friends," she says.  
Her experience is what the group intended. "As our preschool families prepared for Primary 1, they wanted their children to continue learning in an environment that nurtured confidence and well-being," says Fiona Walker, group managing director of Julia Gabriel Education.  
The group, which has offered education services since 1990, launched its student care venture in May 2024 with a centre in East Coast Road.  
It now operates in four locations, with a fifth opening in 2027.  
Pupils at Thrive can attend language programmes taught by specialists deployed from the group's established enrichment arms, Julia Gabriel Centre and Chengzhu Mandarin

Centre.  
During a creative writing class, Primary 2 pupils drew inspiration from New Zealand author Jill Eggleton's book Wildlife Detective (2009), writing from the perspective of a rhinoceros.  
While the majority of Thrive's cohort are in Primary 1 and 2, the curriculum also caters to upper primary pupils. Primary 6 pupil Renee Ong particularly enjoys Project! Project!, where older children develop independent projects based on their personal interests.  
By integrating homework support alongside enrichment, the centre aims to help families reclaim their weekends, says Walker. Instead of rushing to tuition classes, families can enjoy quality time together.  
Monthly fees for Primary 1 to 3 are priced at \$1,500 before GST, which includes the full suite of creative writing, communication, Mandarin and maths enrichment. For Primary 4 to 6 pupils, fees are \$900 a month, with the option to add Julia Gabriel and Chengzhu programmes.  
elisac@sph.com.sg

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## Fun With Kids

Elisa Chia  
Correspondent

### TEA WITH A LITTLE HUNNY

If you and your children are fans of Winnie the Pooh, Tigger, Eeyore and Piglet, SKAI is offering a themed high tea until Aug 31.  
Located on the 70th floor of Swissotel The Stamford, the venue pairs a multi-tiered spread of treats with a panoramic bird's-eye view of the Singapore skyline.  
The menu balances both savoury and sweet items, but honey features heavily throughout as a playful tribute to Pooh's legendary appetite for "hunny".  
The Nectar Garden dessert, for instance, pairs Manuka honey-poached white peach with house-made granola and yogurt gelato.  
To complement the dish, staff will also serve a trio of single-origin Indonesian honeys tableside: cotton blossom honey from Central Java, dark acacia honey from Java and black forest honey from Flores.  
The theme continues with the Hunny Butter Picnic Bun, which features a honey-infused corn bun filled with fig jam and mascarpone, topped with honey jelly and honeycomb.  
Other characters inspire the rest of the selection, including Eeyore, who is represented by A Little Blue Puff – a vibrant blue bun filled with char siu shrimp, ponzu mayonnaise and Oscietra

Make family time all the more special with these ideas and activities.



Winnie the Pooh-themed high tea at SKAI. PHOTO: SWISSETEL THE STAMFORD

caviar.  
Served daily from 12.15pm to 5.30pm, the high tea also marks the 100th publishing anniversary of the classic children's book series.  
The experience is priced at \$78 per adult and \$39 per child aged six to 12 on weekdays, and \$88 per adult and \$44 per child on weekends. Reservations can be made at str.sg/Ciuh

### SANG KANCIL AND THE ENCHANTED FOREST

Visit public libraries over the next two weekends for a free virtual reality (VR) experience titled Sang Kancil And The Enchanted Forest. Based on the South-east Asian folktale of mousedeer Sang Kancil, this multi-player adventure allows your family to help a lost kancil find her way home.  
To begin this journey, you and your child will be equipped with wireless VR headsets to move freely within a safe, semi-guided digital environment. Across eight scenes, you will interact with animated characters. Beyond the entertainment, the story also serves as a reminder of the importance of remaining resilient and caring for others.  
This production is a collaboration between local immersive studio Aventura and Maya Dance Theatre. Through mo-



Immersive fun with Sang Kancil and friends. PHOTO: AVENTURA

tion-capture technology, the contemporary dancers' live movements were turned into digital characters, preserving the nuances of the choreography.  
The imaginative experience has been touring public libraries since June and these are the final two weekends to catch it. Go to Jurong Regional Library on July

25 and 26, or Toa Payoh Public Library on Aug 1 and 2.  
The 30-minute dance-storytelling adventure is suitable for adults and children aged eight and above. Check for an available time slot and register at str.sg/zcMB  
elisac@sph.com.sg