

Parliament Debate on ministries' budgets: Social and Family Development

More support for inclusive education in pre-schools



Tamil language teacher Ahamed Nisha Mohideen Gani helping pre-schoolers Jasmin Tisha Mohammad Rafi (left) and Azlan Nagibullah, both six, explore nature outside Skool4Kidz @ Yishun Orchid Spring yesterday. Ms Nisha completed the Certificate in Pre-school Mother Tongue Language Training last month. The course aims to improve the capabilities of early childhood educators who teach mother tongue languages. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



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Each of the more than 1,900 pre-schools here will have to appoint an inclusion coordinator among its staff from the second half of

2023 as part of efforts to better support children with developmental needs.

These coordinators will receive training and work with other pre-school educators to identify children with potential developmental needs for assessment, and ensure that they get early intervention support.

"For children with developmental needs, it is paramount to identify needs early and provide the necessary support," Minister of State for Social and Family Development Sun Xueling said during the debate on her ministry's budget.

"Our children are precious and we must create environments where they can thrive, and they can feel included and accepted."

The new Inclusive Support Programme pilot scheme, announced by Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat in this year's Budget, will support pre-schoolers aged three to six who need medium levels of early intervention support.

Currently, a majority of children who need medium or high levels of support require multiple intervention sessions a week at early intervention centres separate from their pre-schools.

The pilot scheme plans to integrate the services provided by intervention centres and pre-schools, reducing the logistical strain of shuttling between the two sides and providing more opportunity for better integrated support for the children, Ms Sun said yesterday.

Early childhood educators can also improve their abilities in inclusive education by taking a new Certificate in Inclusive Practice at the National Institute of Early Childhood Development (NIEC), to be introduced later this year.

The certificate will teach inclusive strategies to support children with varying needs within pre-schools.

Ms Sun also announced that KidStart, a pilot programme led by the Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA) to support children up to age six from low-income families, will be expanding to more regions - Choa Chu Kang, Bukit Panjang and Bukit Batok - this year.

The pilot first began in Kreta Ayer, Bukit Merah, Taman Jurong, Boon Lay and Geylang Serai. Last year, it was expanded to Woodlands and Bedok, with plans for expansion to Ang Mo Kio, Sembawang and Yishun this year.

To support the scale-up, ECDA has set up a dedicated KidStart Singapore office to partner an anchor social service agency in each region for better coordinated outreach to families and implementation of the programme.

ECDA is also improving the capabilities of early childhood educators who teach mother tongue languages, said Ms Sun.

Since 2019, ECDA and NIEC have been running Certificate in Pre-school Mother Tongue Language Training (CPMTL) courses for Malay and Tamil languages.

A \$2,000 training bonus, given to educators who underwent the training before Dec 31 last year and subsequently taught mother tongue language, will now be extended to Dec 31 next year.

Ms Sun said there will also be a new CPMTL for Chinese language teaching later this year. It will incorporate knowledge of local Chinese culture and heritage.

Ms Ahamed Nisha Mohideen Gani, 34, a Tamil language teacher at Skool4Kidz @ Yishun Orchid Spring, completed the CPMTL last month.

"The course enhanced my grammar, pronunciation and communication in Tamil, and was a very enriching experience for me," Ms Nisha said. She has since applied the knowledge learnt, such as incorporating an Indian string instrument into her storytelling sessions with the children and teaching them folk dances.