



ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

**DRAWN IN:** A pupil practising Chinese calligraphy at Elias Park Primary's new heritage gallery, as Dr Ng looks on.

## Conversational Chinese and Malay at more schools

BY AMELIA TAN

ALL primary schools and two-thirds of secondary schools will offer conversational Chinese and Malay classes in four years' time.

With the Conversational Chinese and Malay programme having drawn positive feedback from those schools running it, the Education Ministry has decided to expand it, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen said yesterday.

The programme to teach stu-

dents languages other than their mother tongues was begun in 2005 to strengthen bonds among students of different races and to enable them to operate comfortably in the region.

Dr Ng, who was at Elias Park Primary School to mark Racial Harmony Day, said: "As a whole, feedback from students has been very positive, with students using their new language skills to communicate and interact more with schoolmates of different races and from different countries in the region."

The number of schools offering the programme has grown sharply – from 184 in 2006 to 488 now.

Students are taught how to string together basic sentences for everyday use, such as how to introduce themselves, greet others and count.

Some schools have engaged parents and alumni to teach the classes; students have also chipped in to help with the teaching.

This year, Secondary 3 students from Bedok Green Secondary School, working in teams of two or three, taught the Primary 3 and 4 classes at Yu Neng Primary School for 12 weeks.

Bedok Green Secondary's Muhd Faris Asnin, 15, volunteered to teach conversational Malay after seeing the usefulness of knowing some Mandarin himself.

"I feel I am able to bond better with my Chinese friends when I use Mandarin with them. Likewise, if Chinese students can speak some Malay, they would be able to get to know their Malay friends better."

Yu Neng Primary's Lee Jia Pei, nine, said she now practises her conversational Malay on her elderly Malay neighbours, many of whom do not speak English.

"I greet them and ask them how they are. They look happy when I do so," she said.

Yesterday, schools across the island celebrated Racial Harmony Day with students showing up for classes dressed in traditional costumes. Traditional foods were also served.

At Elias Park Primary, Dr Ng officially launched Singapore Heritage@Elias Park Alive!, the school's National Education gallery of artefacts and exhibits on Singapore's history and culture.