



Preschools all prepped for MTL changes

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by Ng Jing Yng

SINGAPORE - With the new Mother Tongue Language (MTL) curriculum on its way to schools here, change is also in store for another group of educators and pupils.

Preschools will have their curriculum guidelines reviewed next year, to align them with the recommendations for primary schools and above.

Some kindergartens and childcare centres seem ready to take the cue from the new directions sooner.

NTUC First Campus principal curriculum specialist Connie Lum told MediaCorp she will incorporate the use of more infocomm technology (ICT) during lessons and create more opportunities for pupils to use Mandarin beyond the classroom.

She added that her pupils are already learning through interactivity, one of the thrusts of the Education Ministry's new MTL curriculum. For instance, they buy stamps and envelopes from a pseudo post office and act in mini skits, using Mandarin as part of the preschool's bilingual curriculum.

Some other preschools also said they have a rich interactivity content in MTL.

At St James' Church Kindergarten, teachers use colourful visuals and rhymes to make learning enjoyable, said principal Jacqueline Chung. As for the use of ICT, she believes that it must be balanced with sufficient teacher-student interaction, so that the young children still get the personal touch.

On Tuesday, Education Minister Ng Eng Hen made this much clear: In terms of the language of instruction used, he is "quite comfortable" if preschools differentiate themselves to cater to different learning needs.

Already, Mandarin-based preschools are gaining popularity here.

Centre manager Sia Li-Anne of Twinklekidz Preschool, which uses Mandarin for 70 per cent of its curriculum, said it caters to the increasing number of English-speaking parents who want their children to have a good grasp of their second language at an early stage.

And Dr Ng encouraged parents to send their children to a preschool that can "balance the home language environment to keep the bilingual policy alive".

For preschool operators, they said their challenge is in training their teachers to stay relevant.

SIM University is one provider of teacher training in Chinese Language. Its programme head in early childhood education, Dr Theresa Lu, said teachers face the challenge of teaching children who came from mainly English-speaking homes and they will need to go for courses to learn how to promote the learning of Mandarin to them.

Parents always have a role to play, and Saraswathy Kindergarten principal J Rajendran said that the MTL outreach needed to begin at the preschool level.

Agreeing with the ministry's recommendations, she said: "It'll be a smoother transition process as students will be exposed to similar teaching methods at the preschool and primary level ... This will help to sustain their interest in learning the language."

Parent Ken Lin, whose daughter is in kindergarten, approved of the plans to update the preschool MTL curriculum. "Kindergartens are the main starting point, and once the love of the language has been cultivated, it'll be much easier to sustain later on," he said.

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