

Priority plan for places at new MOE kindergartens

One-third of places will be reserved for kids from lower-income homes

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THE first five Education Ministry-run kindergartens to open next year will break away from the common practice among pre-schools of giving out places on a first-come-first-served basis.

Instead, one-third of the places in the kindergartens will be reserved for children from lower-income homes.

The rest will be allocated to Singapore citizens with priority given to those who live near the centres. If there are any places left after that, they will be allocated to permanent residents.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat revealed these details at a press conference yesterday, signalling the Government's commitment to help children from disadvantaged homes level up.

Four of the five kindergartens

will be sited in primary schools in the Housing Board heartland and the fifth will be located in a void deck at Tampines Street 45.

Mr Heng reiterated yesterday that the Government was setting up its own kindergartens in order to develop the best approaches and new materials, and share them with other pre-schools to spur improvements all round.

The children will be taught by both diploma and degree holders,

as well as some primary school teachers who will use purposeful play to build their social, literacy and numeracy skills.

All centres will also teach the three mother tongue languages – Chinese, Malay and Tamil.

“Quality pre-school provides a good foundation for future learning. This is particularly so for children from the more disadvantaged backgrounds,” he said, noting that grassroots leaders will be

THE FIVE LOCATIONS

- Dazhong Primary School (Bukit Batok)
- Blangah Rise Primary School (Telok Blangah)
- Farrer Park Primary School (Farrer Park)
- Punggol View Primary School (Punggol Place)
- Void deck in Tampines Street 45

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roped in to reach out to families.

Explaining the admissions policy of the centres, Mr Heng said many of those who had attended the Our Singapore Conversation dialogues had urged the Government to provide more opportunities for children from low- and middle-income homes.

Even the locations of the five centres were planned so that the kindergartens can draw in a good mix of children from low- and middle-income families.

He stressed it was important to include children from different backgrounds so that the methods developed at the centres can be scaled up and implemented in other kindergartens.

The Ministry of Education (MOE), which gave out the other details, said there will be 120 places available at each of the school kindergartens and 80 places at the Tampines centre.

The fee will be \$150 for Singaporeans and \$300 for permanent residents, but there will be subsidies for lower-income families.

For example, children from families with incomes below \$2,000 will pay a subsidised rate of only \$10 a month.

Registration will begin on April 8 at two centres and already, some parents living near the five locations have marked their diaries.

“This is really good news for my two children as I cannot afford a church kindergarten,” said Madam K. Kamala, 30, a divorcee whose rental flat is a five-minute walk from Blangah Rise Primary, one of the five locations.

MOE will start 10 more kindergartens by 2016.

Mr Heng said when the full complement of 15 centres are up and running, there should be a good mix of them sited in primary schools and community spaces.

Those co-located with primary schools will look at how to improve the transition from pre-school to primary school, while the centres at community sites will allow MOE to try out fresh approaches.

Mr Lee Poh Wah, chief executive officer of Lien Foundation which recently launched a pre-school project aimed at levelling up poor children, supported the move to reserve places for children from lower-income homes.

He said: “The future of these children has just brightened. Those in poverty require and deserve extra support.”

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