

Help at hand for kids with developmental needs

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Staff at 53 private pre-schools to be trained to offer early intervention where needed

Goh Yan Han

About 150 staff across 53 private pre-schools here will be trained by the end of this year to identify developmental needs in young children and provide early intervention where needed, under a new initiative.

This will ensure the pre-schoolers receive the necessary care they need as soon as possible from educators at the centre itself, easing the strain on parents who may otherwise have to shuttle their kids between pre-school and therapy.

The six pre-school brands under the Busy Bees Asia umbrella here – Pat's Schoolhouse, Odyssey The Global Preschool, Learning Vision, Brighton Montessori, Small Wonder and Bright Path Inclusive Preschool – have begun offering the new Bright Path Specialised Care initiative at their centres.

Conceptualised by Busy Bees' inclusive education consultant Tricia Tam, the initiative involves appointing two early intervention specialists per centre from among existing staff, who will take two Workforce Skills Qualification courses by the end of this year. Each centre will also send its principal or vice-principal for the courses.

Each course will take about 40 hours, with four hours conducted face to face and the rest involving e-learning. The first course teaches how to pick up signs of developmental needs in children, and how to understand and support them. It is already offered at Asian International College, run by Busy Bees Asia.

The second course will teach how to manage the child based on what was learnt in the first course, such as developing strategies so the child can function in a mainstream classroom.

An average of 3 per cent to 5 per cent of children at each centre have developmental needs, based

on pre-school visits since 2019, said Ms Tam.

Currently, if a child is identified as having developmental needs and the teacher needs additional support, Ms Tam and her team of two others visit the school, where they observe the child and come up with strategies for the teacher.

The new initiative would mean that when trained, the early intervention specialists within the school can come up with and implement the strategies on their own, and eventually mentor other teachers to work with children with special needs, said Ms Tam.

The new initiative comes after the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) announced efforts towards inclusive education during the debate on its budget earlier this month.

Busy Bees Asia chief executive June Rusdon said the group had been planning the launch of the initiative for a long time.

"It is heartening to see that MSF also has very similar goals in the Inclusive Support Programme pilot that was just announced," she said. "This is testament to our continual efforts to innovate and improve our services and offerings, so as to provide our children with the best start in life."

Finance manager Shariffa Nadia, 34, whose seven-year-old son has autism, enrolled him at Bright Path Inclusive Preschool in November 2018. This removed the need to shuttle between the previous pre-school and the early intervention centre.

The new initiative would mean better care for children with developmental needs across the pre-schools, said Ms Nadia.

"Bright Path is a one-stop for everything we need – speech therapy, occupational therapy. It's good to have it all in one location. Now my son doesn't have to go elsewhere for early intervention."

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(From left) Busy Bees' inclusive education consultant Tricia Tam, 34, conducting a training session with pre-school teachers Alifya Onn Gandhi, 35; Tan Yee Ling, 34; and Cai Meiping, 38, at Pat's Schoolhouse Katong last week. Under the new initiative, two early intervention specialists will be appointed per centre from among existing staff and sent for training. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY