

\$10m boost for childcare education

600 new scholarships will target students yet to enter the industry

By TAY SUAN CHIANG

FOR anyone thinking of becoming a childcare teacher, now's the time to do so.

Yesterday, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) said it would commit close to \$10 million for scholarships and teaching awards in the sector over the next two years.

To attract new teachers, MCYS will offer up to 600 new scholarships that target students who have yet to enter the

industry but who want to embark on a childcare career. Current scholarships schemes are focused mostly on part-time training for existing childcare teachers.

With this, the ministry hopes that more people will become childcare teachers, besides raising the quality of the childcare industry.

Mr Chan Chun Sing, the Acting Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports, said that although the sector was seeing an increase in the number of teachers in recent years, there was still a need to ensure an adequate supply of trained teachers for the next phase of expansion.

Some 200 new childcare centres will be built over the next five years.

"The quality of our childcare centres is

only as good as the principals, teachers, administrators and support staff who run them," said Mr Chan, who was speaking at the opening of a childcare conference at Concorde Hotel organised by EtonHouse, an international education group.

Last year about 3,500 new teachers joined the sector. Manpower in the sector increased by 25 per cent, and the attrition rate dropped from 15 to 13 per cent.

The first new scholarship is the full-time diploma scholarship in Early Childhood Care and Education (Teaching). Eighty scholarships will be made available yearly for courses at Ngee Ann Polytechnic and Temasek Polytechnic.

For outstanding students who want to proceed to a degree course immediately after completing their diplomas, MCYS



Ms Ong Pei Qi says her 16-month-old nephew, Hiram Ng, sparked her interest in pursuing a career in childcare. PHOTO: ONG PEI QI

will also offer 15 scholarships a year for the new Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education degree programme.

This programme is offered by the Singapore Institute of Technology, in collabo-

ration with Wheelock College, an American institution.

There will also be greater flexibility in the eligibility criteria for existing part-time diploma scholarships, MCYS said. Teachers will no longer need to be in service for one year before they can apply for scholarships.

And to promote professional development in the industry, there will be scholarships for a part-time diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (Leadership), for those who wish to take on leadership roles.

Teaching awards for specialist courses, starting with a Certificate in Teaching of Music and Movement conducted by Republic Polytechnic, are also included in the package.

For part-time childcare teacher Ong Pei Qi, 20, who graduated with a diploma in Early Childhood Education from Ngee Ann Polytechnic, going for the degree programme was a natural choice.

"The additional knowledge and exposure gained from the degree programme will increase my confidence in being a better teacher," said Ms Ong.

Mrs Ng Gim Choo, managing director of EtonHouse which has 300 childcare teachers, welcomed the new measures.

Said Mrs Ng, 60: "It is difficult to hire teachers because the job is demanding."

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