

Addenda to President's Address

More time and space for students' interests

Schools to also emphasise outdoor activities; tertiary institutions to go beyond academic scores in assessment

Pearl Lee

In the next five years, students can expect less emphasis on academic results, and more time and space to pursue their interests in schools as well as take part in outdoor activities.

As they move to tertiary level, the polytechnics, Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and universities will assess them on attributes beyond their academic scores.

These Ministry of Education (MOE) plans were outlined yesterday by Acting Education Ministers Ng Chee Meng (Schools) and Ong Ye Kung (Higher Education and Skills).

They set out the MOE's focus for the next five years in an Addendum

to President Tony Tan Keng Yam's Address in Parliament last Friday, when he mapped out the Government's goals and policies for its new five-year term.

MOE's move to reduce the over-emphasis on academic results continues an effort that began about five years ago to make learning more enjoyable and examinations not be "overly perceived" as "high-stake endeavours".

It will give primary school pupils more opportunities to pursue their interest in the arts, music and sports, the ministers said.

The policy comes amid expectations from educators, parents and students of a revamp of the way Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) pupils are graded down to the last decimal point, a system

called the T-score.

It will be replaced by grade bands similar to the A1 to F9 grades used for the O levels, a change Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had said in 2013 was to take place in a few years' time.

Ms Denise Phua, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education, said it will take time for mindsets to change.

"Not announcing the top PSLE scores or tweaking the PSLE system will not change the underlying perception about high-stakes exams. Tuition even for the stronger students will still be a feature and a security blanket," she said.

"A lot more attention has to be made to address this mindset."

Last year, then Education Minister Heng Swee Keat, who is now the Finance Minister, said the PSLE changes may take place this year at the earliest.

Parents and children had been as-

sured they will be given enough time to respond and adjust.

The ministry also said in its addendum that strong emphasis will be placed on outdoor education.

The two ministers are in favour of outdoor activities, saying they "build... ruggedness and resilience in our students".

At the tertiary level, the Singapore Institute of Technology and SIM University will offer more applied degree programmes with a strong nexus with industry.

The institutions of higher learning will also expand the way they select students, by assessing them on a range of attributes and not just their academic scores.

Various initiatives are also in place to let individuals build hands-on, industry-relevant skills while in school, and take charge of their personal upgrading after that.

These include the Earn and Learn Programme that lets ITE and polytechnic students study while working for a salary, and the \$500 Skills Future Credit for all Singaporeans aged 25 and older to pay for courses to stay relevant in the workplace.

"The objective is not to chase more and higher qualifications, but to achieve mastery in everything we do," MOE said.

"As a society, economy and nation, we need to recognise and celebrate different forms of successes, and embrace a culture of lifelong learning."

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HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

At every stage of their education journey, we will create an environment conducive for holistic development, by providing them the time, space and opportunity to discover and nurture their talents, strengthen their character, and develop their lifelong love for learning. We will do this together with parents and the community.

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MR NG CHEE MENG, Acting Minister for Education (Schools)

SUPPORT TO DEEPEN SKILLS

From a strong academic foundation, we aim to help Singaporeans discover their strengths and interests, develop their potential, cultivate passions, and fulfil aspirations. We want to support Singaporeans to continually develop and deepen their skills throughout their lives. Ultimately, we hope for a Singapore where every individual is able to contribute actively, and is valued and respected for his or her skills and knowledge, across diverse fields.

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MR ONG YE KUNG, Acting Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills)