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Steps to boost preschool standards

More study awards, career guide
for teachers; kindergartens to
get help for quality certification

■ BY LIN ZHAOWEI

THREE new initiatives announced yesterday are set to boost the standard of kindergartens here.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) announced that more study awards for preschool teachers will be made available from this year, and a guide to career prospects is currently being finalised.

In addition, kindergartens hoping to be certified under a voluntary quality assurance framework may apply for subsidised consultancy services to help them.

Minister of State for Education Lawrence Wong said the MOE hopes to boost the number of preschools that are certified under the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (Spark).

Implemented in January last year, Spark requires preschools to meet standards in areas such as administration, staff management and curriculum.

So far, only 69 out of around 1,500 preschools islandwide have attained the certification.

The Quality Assurance Consultancy scheme, launched yesterday, is aimed at helping more schools meet the Spark requirements.

Under the scheme, the MOE will pay for up to 80 per cent of the cost of engaging consultants to help preschools prepare for Spark assessment. With the consultation service costing \$1,250, this works out to savings of up to \$1,000 for eligible centres.

The ministry also announced new awards to help teachers upgrade their skills and qualifications. These will be given out over the next two years.

A total of 100 awards will be given out so teachers can attend a Republic Polytechnic course on teaching music and movement. Recipients will need to pay only \$420 of the \$2,100 course fee.

Kindergarten teachers can also apply for 40 scholarships on the Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education programme offered by the Singapore Institute of Technology in collaboration with Wheelock College. Each scholarship is worth \$48,000 over two years.

The MOE is currently looking at the possibility of offering certificate courses in other specialised areas, such as motor skills development and art.

To increase awareness on the possible career paths open to preschool teachers, the ministry is currently working on a guide for them. Some of the options include specialising in a particular subject and becoming a mentor to junior teachers.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to The Capstone Kindergarten yesterday morning, Mr Wong said the additional training opportunities and the upcoming career guide would help centres – especially smaller ones – attract and retain staff.

Kindergarten principals and teachers welcomed the new initiatives yesterday.

Madam Asnita Ahmad, principal of Zulfa Kindergarten in Pasir Ris, said it may apply for Spark certification next year, but she is keen to engage a consultant this year so it can get prepared.

“We want to know what the assessors are looking for. It may be difficult to see the problem areas yourself, but an external consultant could help in this,” she said.

Ms Juliana Hoe, 26, who teaches English at The Capstone Kindergarten, said she is keen to find out more about the teaching awards. She said professional development is important for teachers, and learning skills that can be used in class would benefit her pupils.

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