

Pre-school to feature 15,000 sq m outdoor play area

By Priscilla Goy

A NEW pre-school campus being built in Thomson will boast an outdoor play area the size of almost two football fields - believed to be the biggest of its kind among pre-schools on an island becoming increasingly short of space.

Operator EtonHouse International's Thomson Lane campus will have a 15,000 sq m space featuring playgrounds, gardens, dining areas and a swimming pool when it opens in August.

It comes at a time when a growing number of pre-schools are investing in indoor play areas due to a lack of space.

Some have even opened in unusual locations, such as multi-storey carparks.

Last year, the Government pledged to develop about 200 new childcare centres by 2017 to meet growing demand.

It is hoped they will provide enough places for half of the eligible children here, up from one in three last year.

Including the main building, the Thomson campus will span a total of about 18,580 sq m - almost twice the size of the EtonHouse pre-school at Orchard Boulevard, which will make way for the development of an MRT station.

Children at the Orchard campus will move to the Thomson one, which is open to children aged 18 months to six years.

EtonHouse group managing director Ng Gim Choo said the outdoor area will let children "engage the world through their senses and develop an awareness of their surroundings".

The space will also offer health benefits, according to Dr May Lim, an assistant professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology and a trained occupational therapist.

"There is more room for children to develop their motor skills," she said.

"They can also play ball games without worrying about falling into drains or the balls rolling to roads nearby."

But both experts pointed out that the quality of teachers and how they make use of the space are also important.

Children should not be simply running around and the outdoor lessons should be carefully planned, said Dr Lim.

Like the pre-school at Orchard, the Thomson campus will offer the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme, which emphasises inquiry-based learning.

Fees cost about \$18,000 to \$22,800 per year, before GST.

Housewife Dunia Jalali, 30, sends her two-year-old son to the Orchard campus and is a fan of its outdoor space.

"Children are allowed to run free and be creative," said Mrs Jalali.

"They even get to plant papaya seeds and can learn where their food comes from."

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