



Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Education A/P Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim's response at the 11 July 2018 Parliamentary motion

'Education for Our Future'

INVESTING IN STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Recognising that children learn better in school when they have a strong early start, we set up the first five MOE Kindergartens in 2014 with the following admissions policy: To reserve one-third of places for Singaporean children from low-income households. [There is also] the Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme... the Start-Up Grant of \$240... and MOE's Financial Assistance Scheme. Under this scheme, [a student] has his school and miscellaneous fees waived, and receives free textbooks, school attires, and transport subsidies. He is automatically placed on the School Meals Programme, where he can use the meal subsidies for breakfast, lunch, and recess.

Since 2017, we have increased the quantum, and extended the coverage of Government bursaries for ITE, Polytechnic, and AU students... We have also enhanced students' access to these bursaries by introducing Gross Monthly Household Income as an alternative income assessment, so that more students qualify for assistance.

PARTNERING THE MALAY COMMUNITY

Berdasarkan data sepanjang 10 tahun, terdapat peningkatan peratusan pelajar Melayu yang memasuki Pendidikan Posmenengah. 84.1% daripada kohort Darjah Satu tahun 1997 telah memasuki Pendidikan Posmenengah. Bagi kohort Darjah Satu tahun 2006, yang kini sudah berumur 18 tahun pula, 94% daripada kohort tersebut telah memasuki Pendidikan Posmenengah. Kita juga dapat melihat peningkatan jumlah pelajar yang telah meraih kelulusan tiga subjek di peringkat 'O'. Pada tahun 2007, 86.6% daripada pelajar Melayu telah meraih kelulusan sekurang-kurangnya dalam tiga subjek di peringkat 'O'. Pada tahun 2016, jumlah ini meningkat menjadi 91.3%. Bagi para pelajar peringkat A pula, 76.4% daripada para pelajar yang menduduki peperiksaan pada tahun 2007 telah mendapat sekurang-kurangnya kelulusan dalam tiga subjek H2 serta lulus dalam Kertas Am atau Pengetahuan dan Penyelidikan. Peratusan ini meningkat kepada 83.2% pada tahun 2016. Anak-anak kita telah menunjukkan prestasi yang lebih baik sekarang. Dengan kadar kelulusan yang lebih tinggi, mereka mempunyai pilihan yang lebih banyak apabila meneruskan pengajian ke peringkat posmenengah, termasuklah pelbagai peluang untuk meningkatkan pendidikan dan mendapat pekerjaan yang lebih baik.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SEN

All schools have a core group of teachers, known as our Teachers Trained in Special Needs, to provide support to students in our classrooms... Our Allied Educators in Learning and Behavioural Support also work alongside our teachers.

A number of students in mainstream schools also need support for other Physical Impairments or for Hearing Loss or Visual Impairment. MOE fully funds a range of Assistive Technological Devices...to provide integration and learning support for students with physical and sensory impairments... Likewise, students in SPED schools who need AT Devices receive them for free.

LESSONS ON EMPATHY

Mainstream students are learning important lessons on empathy and acceptance of others who are different from them. This includes explicit instruction about the needs of Persons with Disabilities through the Character and Citizenship Education syllabus... The Rainbow Peer Support Leaders Programme by Orchid Park Secondary School does just that. Students... become advocates for their peers, sharing and standing up for them in classrooms.

Our Satellite Partnership programme has been the bridge in linking our students from both SPED and mainstream schools. In the programme, a SPED school is partnered with a mainstream school, and both schools provide purposeful activities, such as joint CCA activities, sharing of facilities and joint school celebrations.

ENHANCING INTEGRATION IN SOCIETY

Have we got the balance right between the customised settings in our SPED schools and the amount of interaction opportunities afforded by Satellite Partnerships today? I think we have made progress, but we still have ways to go... We must welcome and support them, regardless of their background and starting point in life. In other words, where we begin in life will not dictate where we end up. Only then can we call ourselves a truly inclusive nation.

1. Mr Deputy Speaker, Minister Ong had earlier raised the importance of how we should not cap the top, but lift the bottom. I would like to add that to lift the bottom, we are committed to ensuring equal access to opportunities for every child, from pre-school to adulthood.
2. Our commitment goes beyond our students in school to adult learners who have graduated from the formal school system. MOE leads the SkillsFuture movement, which emphasises opportunities for Singaporeans to fulfil their potential, regardless of starting points. A wide range of subsidised modular courses are available through the SkillsFuture Series at our institutes of higher learning. We also empower individuals to make informed decisions for lifelong learning through the MySkillsFuture portal, which hosts online self-assessment tools. This ensures that those who may have had a rockier start than most, can still find a path back into learning, and retool themselves for a better future.
3. For now, let us go back to the start of a child's educational journey. MOE believes that with a robust system of support, all children can go on to lead confident, independent lives with hope in the future. I will cover three points, specifically, how MOE is committed to investing in three groups of students: our students from disadvantaged families; our high-needs learners; and our students with Special Educational Needs.



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INVESTING IN STUDENTS FROM DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

4. First, I will talk about supporting our children from disadvantaged families. Let us start with SitiHajar, who is currently a Primary 1 student at Riverside Primary School. Prior to joining Riverside Primary School, she was enrolled in MK@Riverside in 2016.
5. **Recognising that children learn better in school when they have a strong early start, we set up the first five MOE Kindergartens in 2014 with the following admissions policy: To reserve one-third of places for Singaporean children from low-income households.** This has benefitted children like SitiHajar, who may not have had the opportunity to enjoy quality and affordable pre-school education otherwise.



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6. **Sitihajar also benefited from the subsidies provided through the Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme. Last year, her monthly fees at MOE Kindergarten cost \$150. But because Sitihajar's family met the income eligibility criteria, her parents only paid a monthly fee of \$1.50.** As Sitihajar was also enrolled in KCare for afternoon student care, her parents paid \$2.10, instead of the monthly fee of \$225 for Singapore Citizen children. Sitihajar was also able to redeem three sets of uniforms yearly, as part of the Start-Up Grant of \$240.

7. While she joined MK@Riverside with fear and anxiety, Sitihajar blossomed into a confident and joyful learner. Her experience at MOE Kindergarten gave her a good head start when she enrolled in Riverside Primary School this year.

8. Similarly, her brother, Saiful, who is in Primary 4 this year in the same school, also receives financial support under **MOE's Financial Assistance Scheme. Under this scheme, he has his school and miscellaneous fees waived, and receives free textbooks, school attires, and transport subsidies. He is automatically placed on the School Meals Programme, where he can use the meal subsidies for breakfast, lunch, and recess.** With basic needs such as food and transportation no longer a concern, Saiful is a friendly and helpful student who is fully engaged in his learning. I should add that MOE's financial assistance would apply to Saiful, even if his family is already receiving concurrent help from other agencies.

9. We do not want financial concerns to prevent our children from exploring their interests. **Over the past few years, Saiful has been able to tap on the school's Opportunity Fund to enjoy co-curricular activities, such as a local learning journey to the River Safari.**

10. **Since 2017, we have increased the quantum, and extended the coverage of Government bursaries for ITE, Polytechnic, and AU students. By raising the annual bursary quantum of the Community Development Council/ Citizens Consultative Committee Bursary by between \$200 to \$400, depending on the institution, we can help students further defray the cost of post-secondary education. We have also enhanced students' access to these bursaries by introducing Gross Monthly Household Income as an alternative income assessment, so that more students qualify for assistance. Students may also apply for other merit-based scholarships and financial assistance schemes offered by foundations, Self-Help Groups, and other community or private organisations.**

11. As shared earlier during the PQ, in 2016, over 70% of students at ITE received some form of financial aid, bursaries or scholarships. More than 60% of our students in Polytechnics and AUs receive similar support.

12. So, just like Sitihaajar and Saiful, other children with similar background can be assured that they will be given the same opportunities, regardless of their family circumstances.

INVESTING IN HIGH-NEEDS LEARNERS AND PREPARING ALL STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE

13. Now, I will speak about investing in our high-needs learners, and preparing all students for the future. MOE remains committed to helping our weaker students in schools through levelling-up initiatives. For example, additional teachers are provided to ensure that the Learning Support Programme, and its sister programme, Learning Support for Mathematics, for lower primary students, are conducted in small groups of less than 10. A primary school student on these programmes would have received 60% more resourcing, compared to a peer not on the programme.

14. At the secondary level, MOE provides additional resourcing for students from the Normal course. To smoothen their transition to post-secondary education, these students can take Elective Modules, which are 20- to 30-hour modules that secondary schools may develop together with our ITEs and Polytechnics.



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15. Bendemeer Secondary School is one such school that has done well to support its students from the Normal courses. As part of its Elective Module Framework, the school identifies accredited Science & Technology courses at ITE that would benefit students as they face the future economy. For Secondary 4 students, the Elective Modules are used as precursors for different pathways, leading to post-secondary education institutions. The support provided by Bendemeer Secondary School is not just academic. They also have the Students Overcome Adversity Responsibly, or SOAR programme, that engages at-risk youths after school. Through the programme, these students engage in healthy and meaningful recreational activities jointly-planned by community partners, such as Family Service Centres.

16. MOE also provides authentic work-experience opportunities for students in Specialised Schools, such as NorthLight School and Assumption Pathway School. For students in these schools who are not yet ready to further their education at ITE or start work independently at the workplace, they can join the Work-Study Pathways programme. They will have on-the-job learning at the workplace for three days, and continue with their education for the remaining two. Regardless where our students begin in life, MOE has always placed importance on nurturing students who do not just have the mastery of knowledge, but also skills and attributes required to succeed in life. So, we look at the different strengths and we help them as much as we can.

17. Mr Azmoon Ahmad acknowledged the success of the Malay community and shared his concerns about children from disadvantaged backgrounds. He has concerns if they are able to progress as well as they should. I would like to address this point in Malay.

18. Tuan, ada perbincangan tentang keadaan masyarakat Melayu. Salah satunya ialah kekhuatiran bahawa kita tidak maju, ketinggalan dan tidak disertakan dalam kemajuan negara. Saya mahu meyakinkan anda bahawa perkara ini tidak benar. Sejauh ini, masyarakat Melayu sudah menunjukkan kemajuan dalam pendidikan seperti yang dapat kita lihat dalam data yang akan saya kongsi berikut.

19. Berdasarkan data sepanjang 10 tahun, terdapat peningkatan peratusan pelajar Melayu yang memasuki Pendidikan Posmenengah. 84.1% daripada kohort Darjah Satu tahun 1997 telah memasuki Pendidikan Posmenengah. Bagi kohort Darjah Satu tahun 2006, yang kini sudah berumur 18 tahun pula, 94% daripada kohort tersebut telah memasuki Pendidikan Posmenengah. Kita juga dapat melihat peningkatan jumlah pelajar yang telah meraih kelulusan tiga subjek di peringkat 'O'. Pada tahun 2007, 86.6% daripada pelajar Melayu telah meraih kelulusan sekurang-kurangnya dalam tiga subjek di peringkat 'O'. Pada tahun 2016, jumlah ini meningkat menjadi 91.3%. Bagi para pelajar peringkat A pula, 76.4% daripada para pelajar yang menduduki peperiksaan pada tahun 2007 telah mendapat sekurang-kurangnya kelulusan dalam tiga subjek H2 serta lulus dalam Kertas Am atau Pengetahuan dan Penyelidikan. Peratusan ini meningkat kepada 83.2% pada tahun 2016.

20. Anak-anak kita telah menunjukkan prestasi yang lebih baik sekarang. Dengan kadar kelulusan yang lebih tinggi, mereka mempunyai pilihan yang lebih banyak apabila meneruskan pengajian ke peringkat posmenengah, termasuklah pelbagai peluang untuk meningkatkan pendidikan dan mendapat pekerjaan yang lebih baik.

21. Namun begitu, sebagai sebuah masyarakat, masih banyak lagi yang boleh kita lakukan. Kita haruslah prihatin dengan keperluan jiran, keluarga dan sahabat handai kita dengan memberikan sokongan dan galakan kepada mereka. Kita tidaklah berseorangan dalam hal ini. Saya mahu meyakinkan anda bahawa MOE amat komited untuk memberikan sokongan kepada anak-anak kita tanpa mengira bangsa dan latar belakang.

22. Selanjutnya, saya akan meneruskan ucapan saya dalam bahasa Inggeris tentang usaha dan sokongan kami kepada anak-anak kita dalam Pendidikan Keperluan Khas.

INVESTING IN STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

23. (In English): The last group of students I will focus on is our students with Special Educational Needs. Ms Rahayu Mahzam earlier highlighted her experience as a parent of a child with special needs. The role of parents and caregivers is critical and a challenging one, especially during the crucial transition points of the care recipient's life. As the Senior Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), I would like to reassure Ms Rahayu Mahzam and Ms Chia Yong Yong that the Government has not forgotten families and caregivers of persons with disabilities. As part of our efforts under the Third Enabling Masterplan, we are adopting a whole-of-life approach to ensuring adequate support and transition for persons with disabilities and their caregivers at each life stage.

24. MSF will develop a framework to support caregivers, especially new parents of children with special needs, to build relevant skills and improve their understanding of special needs.

25. For young children at risk of developmental delays, the Government aims to strengthen early detection and intervention to maximise their developmental potential. MSF is piloting the development of a continuum of early intervention services with varying intensities, to better meet the different needs of our children over time.



26. We hope that early intervention will give our children a good start as they progress to formal education. Currently, there are 31,000 students with Special Educational Needs – with 80% of them in mainstream schools and another 20% in our SPED schools.

27. As we support our students, we recognise the need to change the narrative in society. We want to celebrate our children, to focus on their abilities, not disabilities. We want to work toward a society where we do not just accept, but embrace those who are differently-abled. We want to see this cultural change in our schools, both SPED and mainstream.

28. However, we must pace this change. The sense of welcome that we want to achieve has to be developed and achieved over time, and with sustained effort. We need everyone to commit to this – teachers, schools, parents, the public, employers and the wider society. Likewise, we have to teach our children with Special Educational Needs to be advocates for themselves. They must learn how to communicate their needs to friends, co-workers, and employers, and to be confident contributors to society.

29. **MOE recognises the importance of skills-development for all our students with Special Educational Needs. Sometimes these skills are best developed in customised learning environments, such as small groups, so that students with particular learning needs can receive intensive learning experiences. Sometimes the skills need to be developed in authentic “real world” contexts, such as the experience of communicating with typically-developing peers and adults in community settings.**

30. This is because not all our students with Special Educational Needs are comfortable in social settings and require a long term level of support by specially-trained teachers to develop the skills needed. The best combination of both settings – customised and “real world” – varies from child to child. A child who has moderate to severe needs will benefit from extensive support available in SPED schools and a paced inclusion in “real world” settings, through interaction opportunities with peers and adults in a variety of activities.

31. A child with mild Special Educational Needs can function in the typical settings of a mainstream school's lessons and CCAs but will need occasional pull out sessions, perhaps once a week, one-to-one or in a small group, to learn certain skills more explicitly. This is where we are seeking to have a hybrid approach. The learning environment of a SPED school accommodates the needs of such students, allowing them to learn at a comfortable pace. When they are ready, they have opportunities to interact with peers in other schools, such as through the Satellite Partnerships.

32. Internationally, school systems continue to wrestle with the question of what is the right amount of inclusion for students with Special Educational Needs. Ms Chia Yong Yong and Ms Rahayu have shared with us approaches to inclusion which need to be studied further. They can rest assured that MOE will take their suggestions seriously. I thank them for their suggestions.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH SEN IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

33. There are about 25,000 students with Special Educational Needs in our schools. They spend a large portion of their day learning together with their peers. **Since 2005, we have equipped all teachers with a basic understanding on supporting these students during their pre-service training in NIE. All schools have a core group of teachers, known as our Teachers Trained in Special Needs, to provide support to students in our classrooms. We recognise the importance of equipping our teachers with these skills, and have stepped up our efforts to train more in the next few years.**

34. **Our Allied Educators in Learning and Behavioural Support also work alongside our teachers.** Let me illustrate this through the story of Sam from Presbyterian High School. Because of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Sam had difficulties approaching teachers and presenting in class. He would feel sick, and look for opportunities to avoid these situations. This is unfortunate, because while Sam has a flair for Chinese Orchestral music, and plays the “Ruan” well, he is afraid of performing in front of others.

35. Thankfully, we have an Allied Educator, Mr Lae Chung Kit, who worked closely with Sam's teachers and parents, to equip Sam with the strategies to manage his anxiety-related difficulties in social situations. Eventually, Sam applied what he learnt, and put up a great performance in front of the whole school! We know that there are many more teachers and Allied Educators like Mr Lae out there who are supporting our students to overcome their learning difficulties.

36. A number of students in mainstream schools also need support for other Physical Impairments or for Hearing Loss or Visual Impairment. **MOE fully funds a range of Assistive Technological Devices, also known as AT Devices, for them and also collaborates with two Volunteer Welfare Organisations, the Asian Women's Welfare Association and The Singapore Association for the Deaf, to provide integration and learning support for students with physical and sensory impairments. These organisations also provide training for students and teachers on the use of AT Devices. Likewise, students in SPED schools who need AT Devices receive them for free.**



SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH SEN IN SPED SCHOOLS

37. I have shared Sam's journey in a mainstream school. Now, I would like to share the story of Emeth, who graduated from MINDS Woodlands Gardens School in 2017. Deemed ready for work, he was referred to the **School-To-Work Transition Programme, which MOE jointly launched with MSF, and SGEEnable in 2015. Job Coaches supported him at various work experiences organised by the school and its industrial partners.** Emeth's parents also worked with the school to reinforce his travel training skills, and build his stamina and fitness for employment. This year, Emeth found employment at the Yishun Community Hospital, in the Kitchen Department, where he works as a Kitchen Attendant. A job coach continues to support him as he assimilates into the work environment.

38. We are happy to share that 150 children have benefitted from the programme. They are employed in diverse sectors, such as healthcare, homes, retail, and hospitality. By 2019, we hope to expand this programme from the current 12 SPED schools, to 15.



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39. Members have asked whether students like Sam and Emeth get to meet with other students and how well they and their peers are doing in interacting with and understanding one another. **Mainstream students are learning important lessons on empathy and acceptance of others who are different from them. This includes explicit instruction about the needs of Persons with Disabilities through the Character and Citizenship Education syllabus.** Our schools have also developed programmes to strengthen peer support, so that no child is left behind.

40. The Rainbow Peer Support Leaders Programme by Orchid Park Secondary School does just that. Students who have been identified to be part of the programme are taught how to support their classmates with Special Educational Needs. They become advocates for their peers, sharing and standing up for them in classrooms. Admittedly, some schools have gone further along the road to an inclusive culture through these programmes, but it is something that every school is committed to bringing about.

41. **Our Satellite Partnership programme has been the bridge in linking our students from both SPED and mainstream schools.** In the programme, a SPED school is partnered with a mainstream school, and both schools provide purposeful activities, such as joint CCA activities, sharing of facilities and joint school celebrations. As we see our SPED students grow in confidence through the programme, we see our mainstream students grow in empathy. However, partnerships and activities are not limited to the Satellite Partnership. At the recent SYF Festival Concert, students rehearsed and performed alongside each other in a range of items. The upcoming National Day Celebrations will also bring both groups of students together.

42. **The most intensive form of partnership is the social and academic partnership between Pathlight School and Mayflower, Yio Chu Kang, and Peirce Secondary Schools.** This partnership allows for Pathlight students to be taught by Pathlight teachers in self-contained satellite classes sited within mainstream schools. Where appropriate, Pathlight School students join their mainstream peers in their classes for academic learning. This model is possible because the academic and social inclusion opportunities serve the needs of the Pathlight students. The experience is, however, not easy for these students with moderate autism. Yet, gradual exposure over a period of years have benefitted these students who go on to post-secondary education institutes.

43. We have also extended our range of Special Educational Needs support in post-secondary education institutes, as our students with special educational needs move on to the next stage of their education.. **Since 2014, MOE has established Special Education Needs Support Offices, known as SSOs, in each of our AUs, polytechnics, ITE colleges, and arts institutions. This is a one-stop support unit** where students, such as Benjamin, can seek support as they chase their dreams.

44. Benjamin is currently a second-year student with visual impairment, studying for his Diploma of Electrical and Electronics Engineering at Singapore Polytechnic. To ensure a smooth transition to Singapore Polytechnic, the SSO and Benjamin's lecturers worked closely to see how they could facilitate his learning, such as enlarging the font sizes on slides and handouts. The SSO also arranged for Benjamin to visit the Resource Centre at the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped, so he could find the best AT Device for his needs. He eventually chose a handheld device which makes reading easier by enlarging fonts and adjusting the colour contrast of materials. With the support of his lecturers, friends, and staff from the SSO, Benjamin has been doing very well.

ENHANCING INTEGRATION OF STUDENTS WITH SEN INTO SOCIETY

45. As I mentioned earlier, we want to see a change in our schools, both SPED and mainstream — one where our children are celebrated and accepted, where we focus on their strengths and abilities to help them reach their potential.

46. **Have we got the balance right between the customised settings in our SPED schools and the amount of interaction opportunities afforded by Satellite Partnerships today? I think we have made progress, but we still have ways to go.** As I see the passion and the concerted efforts of the teachers in both SPED and mainstream schools, I am confident such inclusion efforts will gain momentum.

CONCLUSION

47. In our schools, we must teach our students to be empathetic and accepting of people who are differently-abled from us, who learn at a different pace from us, and who come from different family backgrounds as us. From the stories I have shared today, it is heartening to see that we are building students of character.

48. **While we are continuously improving the affordability, accessibility and quality of educational support provisions to students, as adults in the world of work and society, we must be sensitive to the needs of every Singaporean. We must welcome and support them, regardless of their background and starting point in life. In other words, where we begin in life will not dictate where we end up. Only then can we call ourselves a truly inclusive nation.**

49. Thank you.

